

Cultural Patterns in Parenting

Changing Conceptions and Practices of Parenthood in Germany

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades

doctor philosophiae (Dr. phil.)

im Fach Soziologie

eingereicht an

der Kultur-, Sozial- und Bildungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät

der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

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Datum der Einreichung: 27.11.2018

Datum der Promotion: 24.04.2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is the outcome of a long and, at times, even adventurous journey. It started as a tentative exploration of the conduct of life of German middle classes at the University of Bremen and developed into a research project on changing norms of parenthood at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Throughout this journey, several companions supported me with their intellectual input, encouragement, and friendship.

I am grateful to my academic supervisor, Steffen Mau, who provided exceptional support and advice. Steffen instigated my sociological imagination through enriching debates and thoughts. He has been an inspiration for me far beyond the sphere of academia. My second academic teacher has been Anette Fasang. Anette developed my interest in family sociology and empirical methods. Without her generous support, I would have been stuck numerous times. Thank you, Steffen and Anette.

I also want to thank my academic colleagues in Berlin and Bremen. At both universities, I found an enriching and thought-provoking environment. The sheer number of important persons makes a simple enumeration impossible. However, I am grateful for the support of my colleagues at the chair of macro- and microsociology at Humboldt University of Berlin. In particular, I want to thank Thomas Lux and Hannah Zagel. Both of them commented on all my articles and provided me with inspiring thoughts. Of course, all remaining imprecision is solely my fault. I also want to thank our student assistants, who supported me in organizing my teaching but also throughout various projects. Their contribution is too often left omitted.

I am lucky enough to have wonderful friends and family without whom this work would not have been possible. I am particularly grateful to Lars, who is an exceptional friend and an outstanding ‘hobby sociologist’. Lars, this work owes you a lot!

Finally, all I know and do is inspired by my parents and siblings. Without their continuous support and encouragement this scientific adventure would have been overwhelming. I dedicate this work to them.

INTRODUCTION

Across Europe, governments have shown a growing interest in the intimate life of families and, in particular, in their childrearing practices (Mätzke and Ostner 2010, Daly 2013a). As a policy field that was “traditionally weak in national political debates” (Clasen 2007: 138), the “politicization of families” (Andresen and Richter 2012: 5), and with it family policy, is rapidly taking center stage. At the same time, attention by researchers (Daly 2013b: 224) and experts (Lee 2014a) has also put families “back into the spotlight” (Ostner, Betz et al. 2017: 5).

Several developments have led to the recalibration of family policies and have prompted a shift in public attention to the issue of families. Firstly, declining fertility rates and population ageing have spawned fears of a pending demographic crisis that will likely hit Western welfare states and their pension systems (Knijn and Ostner 2008). In Germany, fertility rates are well below the population replacement rate with severe consequences for several policy fields (Bujard 2015). Second, rising welfare state expenditures have called traditional social policies aimed at economic maintenance into question (Brettschneider 2008), ultimately leading to the insight that policies should be seen as “productive factors” (Morel, Palier et al. 2012: 2). In light of this social investment paradigm, continuous female labor market participation and early childhood education and care (ECEC) have emerged as key policy goals (ibid.). Finally, policymakers and scholars have identified parenting practices such as reading habits as “a mechanism for tackling social ills” (Gillies 2012: 13). Consequently, several programs have been implemented to help parents improve their childrearing competencies (Daly 2013a, Daly 2015). In this process, certain aspects of domestic life have been put under the auspices of the state (Gillies 2012: 20f., Ostner and Stolberg 2015: 629f.).

This recalibration, however, has not only altered the family policy landscape but also the role of the parent (Daly 2017). How families approach their childrearing and, divide their domestic

work – in short, how they are “doing family” (Jurczyk 2018) – is affected by social policies and mediated through the “*soft power*” (Ritzi and Kaufmann 2014: 100, emphasis in original) of public discourse. As a case in point, the expansion of public childcare in Germany has influenced gender ideologies among West German mothers, which have become less “traditional” (Zoch and Schober 2018). This shift was supported by extensive political debate and media coverage (Knijn and Ostner 2008, Klinkhammer 2014).

Such developments have been observed in several Western welfare states (Shulruf, O'Loughlin et al. 2009, Mätzke and Ostner 2010). The case at hand, Germany, however, is characterized by a policy legacy that has been described as “locked-in and hard to overcome” (Knijn and Ostner 2008: 88). As such, the rapid shift of the German family policy system since the late 1990s constitutes “a critical case for the study of welfare state change” (Fleckenstein 2011: 546).

Germany has long been considered as a prototypical case of a conservative welfare state that emphasized “the preservation of traditional familyhood” (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27). In particular, the (West) German¹ family policy system adopted a strong male-breadwinner model (Stiller 2010: 183f., Fleckenstein 2011). This model encouraged motherhood (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27) and assumed that (married) woman should prioritize childcare above labor once they have children (Klammer and Letablier 2007: 674). Accordingly, public childcare provision was rather limited (ibid.). In general, the German welfare state relied “on the family, that is, the housewife, as a provider of social services” (Seeleib-Kaiser 2002: 27) and, hence, involved a high degree of familialization (Ostner 2010: 220).

¹ After reunification, the West German system was transferred to the former GDR (Ostner 2010: 212). Yet, family norms and patterns still vary (Huinink, Kreyenfeld et al. 2012). Notwithstanding this fact, the analysis at hand emphasizes rather recent developments that concern German parents at large (Ostner 2010: 213). Accordingly, I will only highlight differences when necessary for the argument.

Several particularities of the German political system make reform initiatives a tedious task. In general, multiple veto points and players, a bicameral parliament, and the corporatist make-up of the political system constitute a “joint decision trap” (Scharpf 1988) that might hinder reform initiatives (Stiller 2010: 52-54). Besides these general obstacles of the German political system, there are hurdles that are specific to family policy. Family is a sensitive and normative issue (Blum 2010: 85) that might spawn heated debates between conservative and liberal parties. Moreover, the “principle of subsidiarity” restricts political activity to a certain degree (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27, Seeleib-Kaiser 2002: 27).

Given the institutionalized male-breadwinner model and multiple political hurdles, path dependency was seen as a defining feature of German (family) policy (Ostner 2010: 214f., Stiller 2010: 15f.). However, far-reaching reforms did eventually occur when German family policy experienced a period of modernization and unprecedented political activity from the late 1990s onwards (Ostner 2010, Blum 2017).

In sum, the German family policy system underwent third-order change, which affected policies and public discourse (Seeleib-Kaiser 2016: 225, Blum 2017: 325-330). The main changes to the prior system included a massive expansion of ECEC facilities (“Kinderförderungsgesetz”, KiFöG, Blum 2017: 328-330) and the introduction of a wage replacement benefit for parental leave (“Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz”, BEEG, Seeleib-Kaiser 2016: 225). These measures have been described as de-familializing (Ostner 2010: 219). They are a clear departure from the previously guiding principles of subsidiarity and familialism (Stiller 2010: 189f., Fleckenstein 2011).

As a result, the guiding model of a male breadwinner was replaced by the dual-earner family, while the family-centered childhood gave way to “scholarized” childhoods (Klinkhammer 2014: 517-543). Beyond that, the aforementioned policy packages meant an important shift

towards a state that expands “its reach into the formerly ‘private’ family sphere” (Stiller 2010: 190).

Throughout the process of reforming German family policy, there was an active exchange of ideas between research and politics (Ostner 2007, Leitner 2008). Expertise by economists, demographers, and social scientists figured highly on the political agenda (Klinkhammer 2014: 357f.) and even influenced policies (Leitner 2008). A case in point is the wage replacement benefit for parental leave (BEEG) of 2007, which aimed to increase fertility rates and ensure an early return of mothers into the labor market (Bujard 2013: 140). The legislation replaced the flat-rate benefit that was previously offered with a wage-related component of 67% of previous earnings (capped at €1,800 per month), which is paid for twelve months (up to fourteen months when the partner takes two months of leave) (Blum 2010: 325).

This policy instrument was part of a larger shift to “sustainable family policy” (“nachhaltige Familienpolitik”) (Ahrens 2010) which was legitimized through several scientific reports commissioned by the “Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth” (Leitner 2008: 74). For instance, one argument developed in an expert report by Rürup and Gruescu (2003) stressed the economic utility of families and children. It was subsequently picked up by the ministry, as indicated by an essay by the secretary of the state Malte Ristau (2005), which was entitled “The Economic Charm of the Family” (“Der ökonomische Charme der Familie”). Even though the instrumental use of scientific reports was criticized as an “ex-post strategy” (Ostner 2007: 385), it proved quite successful, as sustainable family policy became a guiding principle even in subsequent administrations (Leitner 2008: 80, Henninger and von Wahl 2010).

In recent years, state involvement with families has been based on the idea that interventions into parents’ childrearing may help to mitigate social inequalities and address further societal issues ranging from poverty to public disorder (Gillies 2012). Accordingly, several

governments have expanded parenting support policies and programs (Shulruf, O'Loughlin et al. 2009, Daly 2013a). Such initiatives aim “*to affect how parents execute their role as parents by giving them access to a range of resources that serve to increase their competence in childrearing*” (Daly 2013a: 162, emphasis in original).

In Germany, policymakers have introduced parenting support largely by amending the Social Code VIII (SGB VIII) but also through “a mushrooming of local model projects” (Ostner and Stolberg 2015: 626). In some cases, these programs were made permanent by the federal government. This has applied to several initiatives focusing on early support (“Frühe Hilfen”) that are coordinated by the “National Centre for Early Intervention” (“Nationales Zentrum für Frühe Hilfen”). One example is the family midwives program (“Familienhebamme”) of 2006, which was made permanent in 2015 (ibid.: 622).

In part, such programs have had a (re-)familializing effect as they involved a “greater top-down monitoring and control of parents’ capacities” (Daly 2013a: 170). The state assigns certain childrearing tasks to parents and subsequently checks whether parents are complying with them (Mierendorff 2013: 51f.), through, for instance, the family midwives program (Eisentraut and Turba 2013). In contrast to reforms focusing on sustainable family policy, the recent “turn to parenting” (Daly 2017: 42) has, however, largely escaped scholarly and public attention (Ostner and Stolberg 2015: 622).

As a part of this (re-)familializing tendency, parents have been encouraged to seek expert advice to inform their parenting, not only within parenting programs and courses (Daly 2013a, Ostner and Stolberg 2015) but also in the political debate (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013: 76f.). Such advice has changed regularly throughout time (Wrigley 1989, Schulz 2003, Ehrenreich and English 2005) but in recent years it has taken a particular form (Lareau 2011: 4f., Ramaekers and Suissa 2012).

Current expert advice boils down to an arrangement of practices that has been described as “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2011). The underlying guidelines emphasize “the importance of talking with children, developing their educational interests, and playing an active role in their schooling” (Lareau 2011: 4). Here, the child is depicted “as a project – soft, malleable and able to be developed and improved” (Vincent and Ball 2007: 1065). Consequently, expert advice has been characterized as “extremely intensive” (Hays 1996: 64, Budds, Hogg et al. 2017). Empirical research has shown that this type of engagement requires parents to dedicate an increasing share of their time (Dotti Sani and Treas 2016), money (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013) and emotional energy (Gillies 2006) to childrearing. Expert knowledge informs family policies that, however, also encourage parents to seek advice on their own (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013: 76f., Daly 2015: 600).

Such intensive guidelines are further fueled by popular readings of psychological and neuroscientific research (Wastell and White 2012, Daly 2017: 44f.). The results of such studies are interpreted as indicating that processes unfolding during a child’s early life – before their brain is “hard-wired” – are very significant (Edwards, Gillies et al. 2015: 168). Even though such accounts have been debunked as oversimplifications, they still figure prominently on the public and political agenda (Wastell and White 2012). The same can be said for the psychological concept of parenting styles, which is used to prescribe certain parental behaviors (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012: 76-83, Daly 2017: 43f.). Finally, prominent economists have stressed that public investments made during early childhood provide “high benefit-cost ratios and rates of return” (Heckman 2008: 290) thus further persuading policymakers to target early childhood (Olk 2007).

Such notions also ascribe new roles to parents which have been described as “parent as teacher” (Schaub 2010: 46) or “parenter” (Daly 2017: 45). The latter is a “person who puts into effect

the knowledge generated about parenting by ‘science’ and the distillation of its messages by the professionals” (Daly 2017: 45).

In the current situation, parents face complex and sometimes even conflicting demands that involve (de-)familialization and responsabilization (Oelkers 2012). These delineated socio-political processes shape parenthood across several countries (Faircloth and Murray 2015: 1122f.). And, in fact, it has been argued that we are witnessing the emergence of “a particular parenting style (...) in Euro-American contexts that is widely considered ‘ideal’” (Faircloth 2014: 48).

Still, the German case is of particular relevance. Here, change has been fast and far-reaching but has also been countered by a persistence of older traditions and periodic backlashes. One example is the childcare allowance (“Betreuungsgeld”) of 2012 (von Wahl and Henninger 2015: 458-461). This policy initiative sought to provide parents who raise their children at home with a cash-for-care benefit. The initiative started a heated debate and was denounced as a “stove bonus” (“Herdprämie”) because it was thought to discourage mothers from returning to work (Klinkhammer 2014: 454f.). Even though this policy instrument was scrapped by the Federal Constitutional Court in 2015, it is still available in some federal states such as Bavaria. Moreover, it is a striking example of the “moralistic component” (Lüscher 2000: 4) that surrounds the public and political debate on families. Such conflicting policies and debates underscore that in (West) Germany “egalitarian ideologies (...) compete with both traditional and multidimensional ideologies” (Grunow, Begall et al. 2018: 55).

Accordingly, the dynamics that have affected family policies and patterns are still ongoing and subject to recurrent controversies. These contradictory developments become even more striking when the policy legacy of the former GDR is taken into consideration. After Reunification, “West German ideas and institutions were transferred to the East” (Ostner 2010: 212), however, the emerging family policy system has rediscovered certain

employment-friendly policies of the former GDR (Ostner 2010: 234). Nevertheless, norms and family patterns still differ between East and West Germany (Huinink, Kreyenfeld et al. 2012). Hence, Germany constitutes an interesting case to study parenthood in times of changing standards and norms.

This study explores parenthood in uncertain times through a perspective that has been termed “parenting culture studies” (Lee 2014b). Research in this vein analyzes how parenthood is shaped by institutions and discourses (ibid., Lind, Westerling et al. 2016). Scholars maintain that the aforementioned changes involve a shift in the hegemonic model of “good” parenthood, with important repercussions for families (Daly 2017: 52).

In particular, studies in parenting culture underline that families develop their understandings of childrearing based on their own experiences but also on societal expectations (Hays 1996: 75, Gebhardt 2009: 15f., Lind, Westerling et al. 2016: 2f.). The societal component “means that there is a strain toward a common model of child rearing” (Hays 1996: 75). This ensures social cohesion and societal reproduction (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 61). However, failure to conform might also lead to “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 1985), stigmatization (Gillies 2005), and detrimental effects on children’s life chances (Lareau 2015).

Research gap and contribution

In sum above-cited research has identified important aspects of the current reconfiguration of parenthood in Germany such as an increasing involvement of experts and state agents with the intimate life of families (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012, Daly 2013a). Nevertheless, some scholars underscore that research should continue to explore cultural models of parenthood in more detail (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 64). This field of research is, they say, still emerging and in its infancy (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 55, Lind, Westerling et al. 2016: 5). This thesis is informed by these approaches but also expands on them in several ways.

First, scholars studying cultural models rarely consider more than one level of sociological analysis (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 64). Analysis of discourses often study a relatively small number of documents, such as a few parenting guides (Hays 1996: 52) or political documents (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013: 73). Hence, these approaches suffer from a methodological disadvantage, namely that individual-level data is rarely available (Quirke 2006: 392). In contrast, scholars studying the minutiae of everyday practices with a qualitative lens often fail to account for larger societal structures that influence individuals (Irwin 2009: 1136). In sum, opening the research frame to both qualitative and quantitative approaches seems both necessary and promising (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 59). This would also mitigate the risk of treating individuals as mere “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1967: 66-75) who just execute cultural scripts.

Second, research shows that the assumption of a uniform cultural model neglects the socio-cultural embeddedness of parents (Gillies 2005). In particular, scholars underline that current models of “good” parenthood presuppose “middle-class circumstances and resources” (Fox 2006: 243). In this perspective, the political emphasis on individual practices is considered an “individualization of social class” (Gillies 2005), in which societal rank is reduced to a function of parenting practices irrespective of material resources (Jensen 2010: 2f., Macvarish 2014: 83f.). Beyond criticizing their implicit bias towards the middle class, studies in this vein rarely explicate the relation to social inequality.

Third, the field has done little to make use of the new possibilities offered by empirical research methods. Cultural models are inevitably characterized by a certain fuzziness (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 63). This, however, should not be taken as an excuse to neglect measurement. As a case in point, innovative methods such as topic modeling treat “text as data” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). They provide a rich set of tools enabling researchers to explore and navigate data sources that were formerly outside an individual’s reading capacity (ibid.: 267). It has been shown that

such methods can be used to study discourses (Törnberg and Törnberg 2016) without sacrificing qualitative sociological enquiry (Stulpe and Lemke 2016).

Fourth, an overreliance on (narrow) rational choice theories in the field of family sociology has raised some concerns in recent years (Fasang, Huinink et al. 2016: 129). Undoubtedly, rational choice theories have provided important insights into family dynamics (Becker 1993) but they fail to incorporate cultural phenomena into their explanatory framework (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 50). Here, research on cultural models could provide a useful counterweight to prevailing theories (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 53, Fasang, Huinink et al. 2016: 129).

Finally, most studies employ cross-sectional data and methods that prevent them from identifying change. Scholars that rely on cross-sectional data inevitably fail to account for public discourse and the timing of policy changes. This issue becomes even more pressing when research sets out to relate policy change and parenting norms. Consequently, Diabaté and Lück (2014: 64) advocate that studies should incorporate longitudinal data in order to trace change over time.

In this dissertation, the recalibration of political and public attention to families is studied from a sociological perspective that seeks to avoid the common pitfalls of analyses focusing on discourses. In particular, it applies a threefold approach in order to shed light on the “politicization of families” (Andresen and Richter 2012: 5) on several levels of sociological analysis (Coleman 1994).

First, I analyze whether public discourses that surrounded the reform of the German family policy system opened a window of opportunity for policymakers to pursue reform. This question is addressed in a longitudinal perspective that helps to identify and situate significant patterns of the family discourse in Germany. The article contributes to the long-standing puzzle of successful reform in a political system that had been considered an “example *par excellence*

of institutional and political resilience to change” (Stiller 2010: 9f.; emphasis in original). In addition, the paper also introduces innovative methods that treat “text as data” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013) into the study of policy processes.

Second, I explore whether facets of the current cultural model of “good” parenting are discussed by parents and how they position themselves in relation to such claims. To address these issues, I used a large parent online forum as a data source. I argue that such data captures processes on the micro and macro level. In this way, the article sets out to bridge the divide between analyses that emphasize discursive change and those that rely on qualitative accounts.

Third, I describe how cultural models might be associated with the reproduction of social inequalities. Using the case of organized enrichment activities, I test this association with the National Educational Panel Study’s (NEPS) kindergarten cohort (SC2). Accordingly, this article addresses the relation between cultural models and social inequality.

In sum, the threefold approach intends to further knowledge on cultural models of parenthood by making use of innovative computational social sciences (CSS) approaches. Methods such as web scraping and topic modeling enable sociologists to process large and often untapped data sources (Heiberger and Riebling 2016). These methods have been adopted to study cultural phenomena (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013, Lee and Martin 2015). As a result, they are particularly useful for overcoming the overreliance on rational choice theories that characterizes family sociology. Notwithstanding this, family sociology has been rather reluctant to adopt CSS. Accordingly, a major contribution of this dissertation is to introduce innovative methods to the field of family sociology. In addition, the analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the “turn to parenting” (Daly 2017: 42) in Germany by exploring dynamics on different levels of sociological enquiry. Finally, a research program is identified and elaborated in order to organize the field of parenting culture studies.

The introductory chapter proceeds in the following way. The next section develops a research program that is applied throughout the dissertation. The subsequent section then presents the individual articles and their contributions as well as the relation to the overarching research program. The closing section integrates the results into the scholarly literature. In addition, it also addresses limitations of the analysis and identifies prospects for future research.

CULTURAL MODELS OF PARENTHOOD

The field of family research is thriving, and scientific knowledge on family processes in general, and, on parenting in particular, is accumulating quickly (Crosnoe and Cavanagh 2010). Given the aforementioned drawbacks of current research in this field, however, it is necessary to organize the scattered empirical findings into a unifying research framework.

In the following, the existing body of work on “parenting culture” is structured using work on cultural models of the family (Diabaté and Lück 2014). In particular, I follow Diabaté, Ruckdeschel et al. (2015) in their assessment that research on cultural models² constitutes a “missing link” for family research. Accordingly, the remaining section will sketch out their model, which I will then use to structure the main findings of the literature.

Following Diabaté and Lück (2014) cultural models are defined as “a cluster of collectively shared and figurative beliefs of the “normal”, that is something desirable, socially desired, and/or supposedly widespread, in short, something taken-for-granted” (56, translated). They, moreover, have a “dual character as both micro- and macro phenomenon” (ibid.: 64, translated) and, hence, circumvent the currently predominant focus on the macro level.

² Diabaté, Ruckdeschel et al. (2015) use the German term “Leitbild” which they translate as “guiding role models” (Diabaté and Lück 2014). This article, however, will stick with the term “cultural models” as it has a longer history in the study of parenthood and is still used prevailingly today (Hays 1996: 21).

Cultural models are supported by structural circumstances that, again, work on several levels³. On the macro level, specific policies incentivize certain role models (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 60). As a case in point, West German family policy was tailored towards the male-breadwinner model and thus encouraged corresponding gender roles (Klammer and Letablier 2007: 674). Other factors such as the demographic composition of the society or the structure of the labor market also potentially affect cultural models. On the meso level of sociological analysis, disparities might persist due to cultural regional traditions (Fulda 2015). It has also been shown that differences arise through class-based cultural models (Stefansen and Farstad 2010, Lareau 2011). Finally, on the micro level, individuals have specific ideas about parenthood and family that are, however, restricted by their material resources and shaped by the aforementioned processes. For instance, Vincent and Maxwell (2016) report that organized activities are a cornerstone of children's schedules today (278). At the same time, material resources might prevent less affluent parents from enrolling their children in such activities. As they put it laconically, "these classes cost and some cost a lot" (Vincent and Maxwell 2016: 274).

Individuals reproduce cultural models in their everyday practices because of three processes (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 59). First, cultural models provide reliable and tried-and-tested strategies. Following a certain model thus relieves individuals of the burden of finding their own solutions. In this case, cultural models have some parallels with Esser's (1990) concept of "frames" or "habits" (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 53). As a result, cultural models do not presuppose that individuals have perfect information like it is the case with narrow rational choice theories (Boudon 2003: 3f.) but allow for value-rational ("wertrational") decision-making (Kroneberg 2007) and "satisficing" (Simon 1997 [1945]: 118-120) as mechanisms of

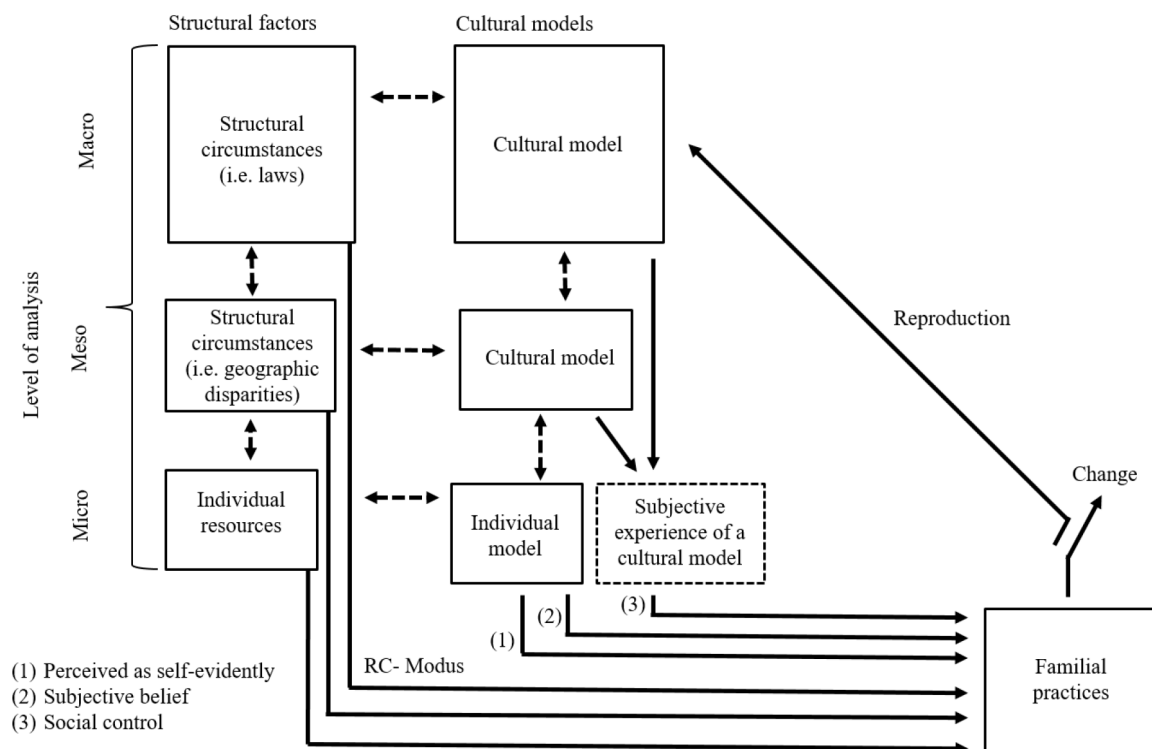
³ The differentiation of societal levels might create the impression that all factors work in a well-defined environment. However, the micro and macro differentiation rather provides an analytical heuristic. Empirical phenomena such as class-based practices might work across levels and are less clear cut.

complexity reduction (Schimank 2005). Second, individuals might follow a cultural model because they deem it as suitable. Hence, a cultural can be a societal expectation but also a subjective belief. Third, processes of social control might compel individuals to conform with certain expectations of a cultural model. Nonetheless, Diabaté and Lück (2014) underline that rational deliberation might also be involved (60).

More importantly, though hegemonic cultural models are characterized by a certain inertia, the model allows us to account for potential pathways of change (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 58). Cultural models might leave their common pathway through incremental change. Most cultural models do not provide a fully coherent package of beliefs and practices (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 58). As such, individuals inevitably have to adapt cultural models to their circumstances. Many small adaptations might, in sum, lead to an entirely different cultural model. In contrast, changes might also come about due to disruption when structural circumstances change in a manner that prohibits “business as usual”. This might also be the case when sudden policy shifts occur. Finally, the hegemony of a certain cultural model is always at risk due to the possibility of replacement by other models. In this perspective, cultural models are characterized by recurrent struggles around “the legitimate view of the social world” (Bourdieu 1985: 731). This also implies that cultural models might differ between subpopulation in and across societies (Stefansen and Farstad 2010: 133-136).

Figure 1 below summarizes the relationship between structural factors and cultural models on several levels of sociological analysis. The figure was adapted from Diabaté and Lück (2014: 60) with some changes. In the following, I use this research framework to organize the existing body of research on cultural models of parenthood.

Figure 1. Research framework for the analysis of cultural models adapted from Diabaté and Lück (2014: 60)



There is plenty of research on structural factors and cultural models on the macro level. Most often, scholars analyze parenting manuals in order to establish “a window on cultural norms for childrearing” (Hoffman 2009: 16). A recurrent theme here is the intensification of advice (Hays 1996: 57-64), both in terms of quality and quantity (Quirke 2006). Looking at literature over longer periods of time has, moreover, enabled researchers to identify points of change (Wrigley 1989, Ehrenreich and English 2005, Hardyment 2007).

Another important source of data that is increasingly used to trace cultural models of parenthood are political debates (Klinkhammer 2014) or political documents (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013, Ritzi and Kaufmann 2014). In short, research indicates that politics, science, (educational) professionals, and childrearing manuals are among the main promoters of cultural models

(Beck-Gernsheim 1997: 109f., Lupton 2011: 637f., Daly 2017: 43-48). However, scholars are seldom able to identify the effect of cultural models on the micro level.⁴

On the meso level of analysis, research has primarily tried to locate class-based differences in cultural models. Most prominently, Lareau's (2011) ethnographic study⁵ reported that working and middle-class parents raise their children according to two different logics: "accomplishment of natural growth" and "concerted cultivation". While middle-class parents orchestrate a number of organized activities, put an emphasis on negotiation, and are highly involved in their children's schooling, their working-class counterparts employ a looser schedule, use more directives, and are less involved in their children's school affairs (ibid.: 2f.). Lareau's (2011) findings have been supported by both qualitative (Irwin and Elley 2011, Vincent and Maxwell 2016) and quantitative (Bodovski and Farkas 2008, Cheadle and Amato 2011) follow-up studies.

Using individual level data, research has shown that many facets of the hegemonic cultural models are widely accepted by individuals. This holds for the parenting practices described as concerted cultivation (Lareau 2011) and for the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays 1996: 86-96). Still, scholars also emphasize that it is crucial to consider how individuals "interact with this discourse" (Romagnoli and Wall 2012: 277).

For instance, research indicates that middle-class parents are more eager to adopt changing advice (Lareau 2011: 5, Budds, Hogg et al. 2017: 350f.), while their lower-class counterparts are more resistant (Romagnoli and Wall 2012). It is unclear whether this is due to a lack of

⁴ A notable exception is Hays (1996) who analyzes parenting manuals and conducts qualitative interviews with mothers.

⁵ Lareau (2011) visits families and follows them throughout their day (9). As such, her analysis rests on individual level data. Following Diabaté and Lück (2014), class-based cultural models might work through the meso level. In order to be stringent, I stick with their heuristic.

resources (Fox 2006: 243) or knowledge (Lareau and Weininger 2003: 589f.), or whether it is an active act of resistance (Romagnoli and Wall 2012: 285).

An often overlooked and rarely elaborated link between the macro and micro level has been developed by Lareau (2011). She maintains that (educational) professionals agree on the general principles of childrearing. As such, professional expectations

“form a *dominant set of cultural repertoires* about how children should be raised. This widespread agreement among professionals about the broad principles for child rearing permeates our society. A small number of experts thus potentially shape the behavior of a large number of parents” (Lareau 2011: 4, emphasis in original).

This account can usefully link studies that identify cultural models on the macro level and those that use individual level data. However, it is still necessary to demonstrate how individuals adapt to cultural repertoires. Lareau (2011: 5) argues that when confronted with changing expert advice middle-class parents shift their practices more rapidly than their working-class counterparts.

What is more, this link also provides a potential explanation for the reproduction of social inequalities. This occurs when cultural models become embedded in institutions (Schaub 2010: 47). Individuals who lack cultural knowledge (Lareau 2015) are unable to follow the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 99). In this way, institutions such as schools might restrict the access to desirable goods (Lareau and McCrory Calarco 2012). For instance, McCrory Calarco (2014) has shown that teachers expect children to seek help in a certain way. She argues that middle-class parents actively endow their children with strategies that enable them to seek help in proper ways. During exams, this gives them a competitive advantage over working-class children who have no such strategies at their disposal and subsequently stick to “a no-excuses approach” (ibid.: 1022).

In sum, the framework provided by Diabaté and Lück (2014) serves as a useful tool to structure the research on cultural models of parenthood. They have also traced important limitations of the current state of literature (ibid.: 64). In their work, they maintain that research needs to describe cultural models of parenthood in more detail and, in particular, add a longitudinal perspective. Moreover, they stress that the relationship between cultural models on the macro and micro level needs further consideration. Finally, they identify potential processes that lead to the reproduction of cultural models without conceptualizing individuals as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1967: 66-75).

Unfortunately, their research falls short in several regards. First, they apply rather canonized methods that fail to bridge the divide between qualitative and quantitative approaches, which, however, seems necessary to understand cultural models (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 62-63). Second, their approach introduces existing cultural models in an ad-hoc way. Consequently, they fail to account for structural factors on the macro level such as political changes. As a result, they show that family attitudes cluster in a meaningful way but stay vague on the driving forces that evoke the empirical pattern (Diabaté, Ruckdeschel et al. 2015: 14). Finally, they neglect methodological developments that provide a useful toolkit for studying cultural phenomena (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013, Lee and Martin 2015).

The following section introduces the three papers of the thesis. As aforementioned, the articles address several drawbacks of the current state of the field and hence further our knowledge on cultural models of parenthood in Germany. In particular, this thesis introduces innovative methods from the toolkit of CSS to family research. As will be shown, these methods are particularly suitable for studying cultural phenomena. Moreover, while the research program tells us where we should look at to identify structural drivers of cultural models, studies have largely refrained from tracing these influences both empirically and across several levels of

sociological analysis. Accordingly, the articles study cultural models of parenthood on the micro and macro level in order to identify linkages and driving factors.

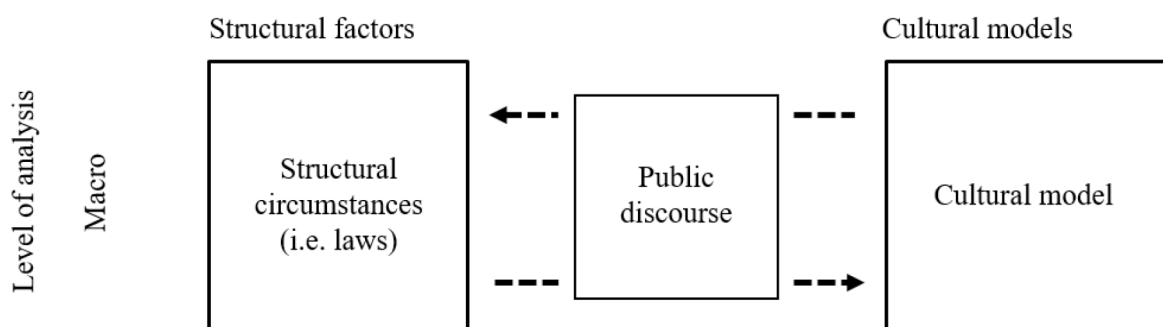
APPLYING THE RESEACH FRAMEWORK: OVERVIEW OF THE THREE PAPERS

PAPER 1:

Gülzau, Fabian. “A Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy: Applying a Topic Model to Map Reform and Public Discourse, 1990-2016” [completed manuscript]

The first paper “A Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy: Applying a Topic Model to Map Reform and Public Discourse, 1990-2016” explores the public discourse that surrounded the reform initiatives of German family policy from 1990-2016. Hence, the article addresses a question that is located at the macro level of the research framework (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Research framework of paper 1



Politics and policy are important constituents of the “politicization of families” (Andresen and Richter 2012: 5). Ultimately, the extensive changes in German family policy (Ostner 2010) have led to an expansion of government’s “reach into the formerly ‘private’ family sphere” (Stiller 2010: 190). The male-breadwinner model has been replaced in the political agenda by the dual-earner model, while the family-centered childhood has given way to the “scholarized” childhood (Klinkhammer 2014: 517-543).

This outcome, however, was deemed highly unlikely (Fleckenstein 2011: 545f.). German family policy was generally characterized as “locked-in and hard to overcome” (Knijn and Ostner 2008: 88) because several institutional hurdles make reform initiatives difficult (Stiller 2010: 52-54). The paper sought to resolve this puzzle by drawing on the insight that public discourse is crucial for policy change (Schmidt 2002, Ostner 2008: 58). Public discourse can open windows of opportunity for change that are used by policymakers in order to push for their reform initiatives.

At the same time, political debate and policies entail and promote cultural models of “good” parenting (Lüscher 2000, Betz, de Moll et al. 2013, Klinkhammer 2014). As such, the relationship between public discourse and politics is a bi-directional process.

The analysis used articles that have been published in four German national newspapers and magazines (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Spiegel Magazine*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*) from 1990 to 2016 to analyze whether their reporting was responsive to political debate, reforms, and critical events. Mass media outlets are the main channel for communication between politicians and the wider public (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009: 306). Their reporting is, moreover, sensitive to societal and political change (Gerhards 1999, DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013, Schröder and Vietze 2015).

In sum, the newspaper corpus allowed me to undertake a detailed mapping of the change in policy and public discourse over time; this enabled me to pin down the temporal order of shifts in public discourse and policy implementation. The corpus was constructed using two keywords, namely “early childhood education” and “early learning support”, which were of high salience during the reform debate (Clasen 2007, Augustin-Dittmann 2010: 163f., Seeleib-Kaiser 2016: 225).

The methodological approach applied topic modeling (Blei 2012) and qualitative content analysis. This approach, which combines distant and close reading, has been termed “blended reading” (Stulpe and Lemke 2016) as it uses “computers [to] *amplify* human abilities” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 270, emphasis in original). Such a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is particularly suitable for studying cultural models (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 62). However, the potential of these innovative methods has largely been left untapped in the field of family research.

The analysis indicates that the “PISA shock” was a critical event for the reform of German family policy. The low scores obtained by German school students spawned a heated reform debate and helped policymakers to overcome the separation of early childhood, which was hitherto a private issue for families, and the education system. Other arguments criticized women’s comparatively low participation in the labor market. In addition, the fear of a looming demographic crisis was used by policymakers to advocate for their reform initiatives. Finally, economic considerations played a crucial role in the legitimization of the reform.

The article also traced “discursive strategies” (Gerhards 1992: 310) of the political actors. Even though the PISA results were identified as a *social problem* (ibid.: 310f.), they were still descriptive and did not entail specific policy recommendations (Maas 2016: 310f.). The newspaper coverage, however, provided detailed country comparisons, which were used to identify potential causes for the “PISA shock”. In particular, the Scandinavian countries were depicted as potential role models for reform. They served as prominent examples of welfare states that have managed to combine high female labor market participation and high fertility rates. Moreover, their educational systems scored higher in the comparative PISA study. Identifying causes for a social problem makes it more likely to engage the wider public in support of an issue (Gerhards 1992: 311f.).

In sum, the article made a case for incorporating public discourse when explaining social policy shifts. It shows that newspaper articles are a useful source for exploring public discourse and framing reform initiatives. In addition, it demonstrates how innovative CSS methods such as topic models can be applied to make large corpora manageable for social policy researchers without giving up on qualitative enquiry.

More importantly, the paper demonstrated that critical events such as the “PISA shock” can open windows of opportunity for policy reform. However, such events do not immediately translate into policy change. It is rather the interaction between events, public discourse, and policymakers that drives reform debates. The procedural unfolding of this interaction needs further consideration in prospective studies in order to disentangle the causal components of policy change.

PAPER 2:

Gülzau, Fabian (2018). “Sandkastengespräche im Netz? Leitbilder ‚guter Erziehung‘ in einem digitalen Elternforum” Zeitschrift für Familienforschung/Journal of Family Research **30**(2): 151-175. [accepted on: 01.06.2018]

The second paper “Sandkastengespräche im Netz? Leitbilder ‘guter Erziehung’ in einem digitalen Elternforum/Playground Chatter on the Internet? Models of ‘Good Parenting’ in a Parent Online Forum” establishes a link between cultural models of parenthood on the macro and micro level.

Figure 3. Research framework of paper 2

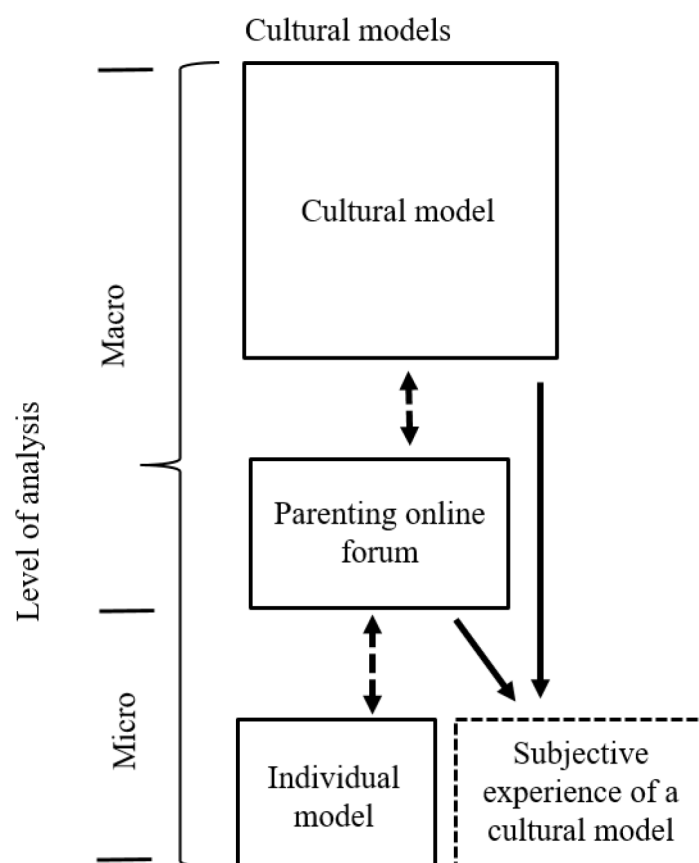


Figure 3 shows how the second paper is located within the overarching research framework. The article addresses three issues. First, it reviews the current literature on cultural models of “good” parenthood. Second, the parenting online forum is used to assess whether users actually discuss facets of the current cultural models. Third, the individual user contributions provide a way to analyze how parents discuss normative expectations. Thus, the paper not only analyzes *which* facets of the cultural model users discuss but also *how* they negotiate them.

The literature review traces the current cultural model of “good” parenthood in few fields: politics, science, (educational) professionals, and childrearing manuals. According to several scholars, developments in these areas are of outmost importance for (changing) norms on parenthood (Beck-Gernsheim 1997: 109f., Lupton 2011: 637f., Daly 2017: 43-48).

This review shows that early childhood is construed as a critical period in which important developmental processes take place. This period is of great significance for the child him-

/herself but is also key for societal progress (Edwards, Gillies et al. 2015). The latter claim is often justified by referring to arguments from a social investment perspective (Olk 2007, Ostner 2010). Moreover, the role of distinct parental practices for a child's development is increasingly being highlighted (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012, Daly 2017). Finally, parents are being encouraged to use expert advice to inform their childrearing (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012: 23-28, Betz, de Moll et al. 2013).

Most scholars use documents such as parenting advice literature (Wrigley 1989, Quirke 2006, Hoffman 2009) or political resources (Betz and De Moll 2013, Betz, de Moll et al. 2013, Ritzi and Kaufmann 2014) to identify cultural model of parenthood. However, such approaches have been called into question because of their inability to analyze how parents “interact with this discourse” (Romagnoli and Wall 2012: 277).

The data set consists of 58,240 contributions that users of a large German parent online forum⁶ submitted between December 2006 and July 2017 to a sub-forum addressing the topic “Development and Parenting” (“Entwicklung und Erziehung”). This data set enables an analysis of specific discussions or individual user contributions but also allows me to explore larger patterns of the discussion in the parent online forum. In this way, the approach bridges the micro-macro divide that characterizes the state of the field (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 64).

In particular, the methodological approach uses topic modeling (Blei 2012) to identify the predominant themes of the online discussions. This allows me to explore whether facets of the current cultural model of “good” parenthood are relevant for users. Previously, the sheer vastness of digital communication prevented sociologists to make use of these unexplored data. Finally, this approach is combined with a more fine-grained content analysis of particular

⁶ The discussion board is hosted by a German parent magazine called “Eltern” (*parents*). At the time when the data set was constructed, the discussion board had nearly sixteen million contributions from more than 150,000 registered users (as at January 3, 2018).

discussions in order to scrutinize how parents position themselves concerning normative expectations.

The results show that several normative expectations are discussed by users of the parent online forum. In particular, many popular parenting manuals are reviewed in recurrent threads. This indicates that the consultation of expert knowledge is a frequent practice today. What is more, parents also adopt concepts from psychological research to describe and reflect their childrearing practices. In contrast to analyses based on macro level data, the forum users do not perceive childhood as a critical period that calls for particular attention. This also holds for practices aimed at the cognitive development of children, which are only reflected on discussions on the educational system and children's schooling.

The model also helped to identify further topics. For instance, the users talk about nutrition or their children's sleeping habits. In addition, the risk of (excessive) media use and legal drugs such as alcoholic beverages or cigarettes are addressed. Finally, gender roles and work-life balance are discussed. Such topics reflect societal change and hence stress the importance of including societal circumstances into the research framework.

In a final step, the "parenting manuals" topic which was identified using the topic model, was studied using a qualitative content analysis. Hence, the analysis was able to scrutinize the sentiments held by parents discussing this topic. The qualitative component showed that parents relate to parenting manuals predominantly in a positive manner. This is also confirmed by the fact that users apply terms and concepts from popular guides to reflect upon their childrearing.

In sum, the analysis established that online discussion boards constitute a "window on cultural norms for childrearing" (Hoffman 2009: 16). More importantly, online discussions can be used to bridge the micro-macro divide that characterizes much of the literature on cultural models of

parenthood. Finally, the analysis indicates that facets of the current cultural model of parenthood have become relevant cornerstones for the discussion on childrearing in Germany.

PAPER 3:

Gülzau, Fabian (2018). “(Un)equal from the Start? A Quantitative Analysis of Preschool Children’s Participation in Organised Activities in Germany.” European Early Childhood Education Research Journal 26(6): 855-872. [accepted on 04.06.2018]

The third paper addressed the relationship between cultural models and social inequality. In particular, the paper investigated preschool children’s participation in organized activities. Political debate and expert advice has stressed the role of organized activities for children’s cognitive development (Vincent and Maxwell 2016). These activities could potentially diminish disparities (Vandenbroeck and Lazzari 2014). However, organized activities could also be “building blocks in class care strategies” (Stefansen and Farstad 2010: 121) and hence constitute “a mechanism through which social inequalities are maintained and reproduced” (Bennett, Lutz et al. 2012: 131).

Given these contradictory perspectives, the scarcity of empirical evidence on the actual use of organized activities is quite surprising. In Germany, early childhood education and care (ECEC) was expanded relatively late (Klammer and Letablier 2007: 674). Moreover, public childcare is not mandatory and many children only attend childcare facilities in the morning (BMFSFJ 2012: 26). This leaves the particular care arrangement to the discretion of the parents and hence also leaves room for social class disparities (De Moll and Betz 2014: 238f.).

Although the relationship between social class and parenting has attracted considerable attention, scholars are debating “whether structural conditions or cultural understandings are the more important influences” (Sherman and Harris 2012: 60). The paper addresses this issue

by asking whether money or culture matters (more). More importantly, the analysis tackles this issue “through a social class lens” (Hartas 2015: 33).

Figure 4. Research framework of paper 3

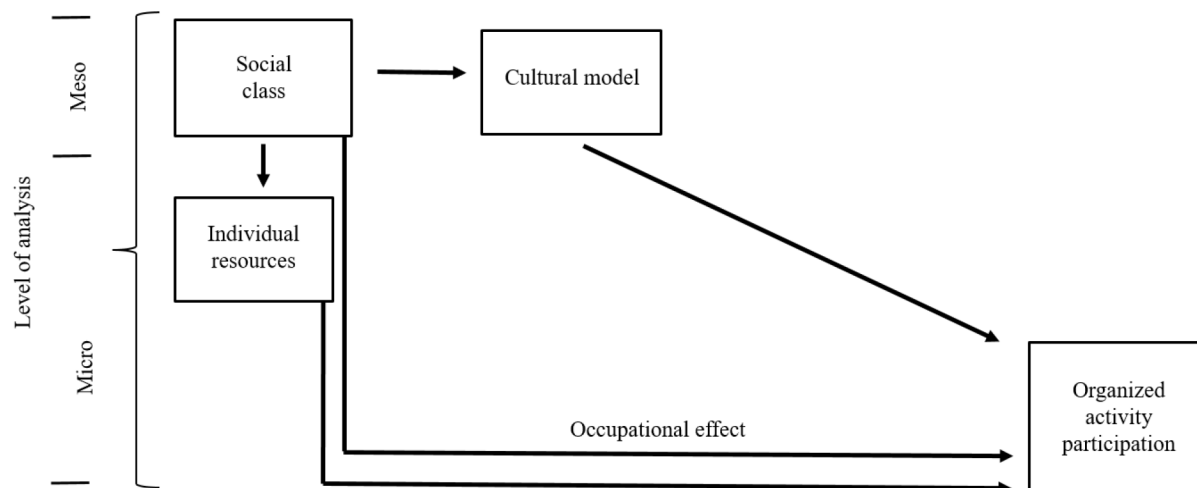


Figure 4 illustrates how the third paper is located in the overarching research frame. Organized activities are a common part of children’s everyday schedules and are promoted as a way to develop their talents (Smyth 2016, Vincent and Maxwell 2016). Still, scholars are divided on whether culture or monetary constraints matter more for the social class gap in activity participation (Bennett, Lutz et al. 2012, Sherman and Harris 2012, Weininger, Lareau et al. 2015). According to Diabaté and Lück (2014: 60), the figure displays the effect of social class and culture on the meso level. All effects are, however, modeled on the individual level.

There are three perspectives on this issue. The first one maintains that financial constraints are the main hurdle that inhibits less affluent parents from enrolling their children in organized activities (Chin and Phillips 2004, Bennett, Lutz et al. 2012). The second perspective underlines that distinct understandings of the child and his/her needs lead to unequal participation rates (Stefansen and Farstad 2010, Lareau 2011). A final approach emphasizes the effect of occupational conditions on parenting. According to this perspective, position in the occupational structure is correlated with certain demands on the job – i.e. to obey authority or to exercise self-direction (Kohn 1963, Kohn and Slomczynski 1993). These demands also

influence value commitments, which then steer childrearing practices (Chan and Koo 2011). For instance, Weininger and Lareau (2009) have shown that middle-class parents perceive organized activities as a way of encouraging independence in their children, and as a way of subtly controlling the course of their children's curiosity and (self-)direction.

Thus, the paper analyzes the extent to which parents social class, material resources, and culture contribute to unequal organized activity participation by their offspring. The data is provided by the National Educational Panel Study's (NEPS) kindergarten cohort (SC2) which includes information on different activities. In particular, these are sport activities, music lessons, language courses, and other activities.

The analytical approach applies logistic regression with cluster-corrected standard errors and the Karlson-Holm-Breen (KHB) method (Karlson, Holm et al. 2012) to disentangle the contribution of resources and culture on the social class gap in organized activity participation. The nested structure of the data with preschool children being nested in kindergartens requires techniques of multilevel modeling or standard error correction for clustered data. The latter approach is applied as no hypothesis for the impact of the higher level is formulated.

The KHB method is used to account for the problem of rescaling in non-linear models (Karlson, Holm et al. 2012). In such models, regression coefficients of nested models are not comparable as they are in the case of OLS regression. However, the KHB methods enables me to report the magnitude of the effect that social class has on organized activities broken down according culture and monetary constraints.

The analysis shows that the dividing line between scholars who align themselves with either a structural or cultural approach to social class and parenting is an artificial one. Both paths work in tandem rather than individually. More importantly, strong disparities still exist between

children of more affluent and educated parents in the service class and those of working-class parents, who lack the resources to provide their children with several organized activities.

Accordingly, further theoretical work is necessary to integrate the aforementioned perspectives. We still have insufficient empirical data on social class differences in organized activity participation. Notwithstanding this fact, governments across Europe have identified informal education as a potential vehicle to mitigate social inequalities (Gillies 2012). For instance, the German government supports less affluent children in participating in leisure activities by providing monetary subsidies (BMAS 2015). While these children can potentially benefit from the program, its design does not address the factors that lead to an unequal uptake of organized activities.

DISCUSSION

This project set out to explore cultural models of parenthood in Germany. Since the late 1990s, Germany has experienced a “politicization of families” (Andresen and Richter 2012: 5) that has not only affected family policies but also the role and function of families (Daly 2017). On the one hand, sustainable family policy has stripped parents of certain childcare tasks but, on the other hand, political and public discourse has required a “greater top-down monitoring and control of parents’ capacities” (Daly 2013a: 170). These complex developments show that change is still ongoing and subject to recurrent controversies. The current cultural model of parenthood does not yet constitute “an overall complete package” (Daly 2017: 52). Against this background, the thesis developed a research framework in order to identify the core pillars of the current cultural model of parenthood.

According to Diabaté and Lück (2014), the field needs to further describe such models. Addressing this issue, the first paper, “A Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy: Applying a Topic Model to Map Reform and Public Discourse, 1990-2016” asked whether public discourse and critical events helped to open a window of opportunity for policymakers to reform the

German family policy system. This article also demonstrated how innovative methods from CSS can be used to map how public discourse developed over time. It, moreover, showed that early childhood and (formal) education were fused by the “PISA shock” in order to bring about the paradigm shift in German family policy.

However, the change also meant that parents were confronted with complex and sometimes even conflicting demands that involve moments of (de-)familialization and responsabilization (Oelkers 2012). Against this background, the second paper used data from a parent online forum to assess how parents deal with changing expectations and roles. Again, innovative methods such as topic modeling made it possible to analyze a huge number of user contributions that were once too extensive for sociologists to read. The article found that the users of the online forum reflect on their own childrearing by consulting expert knowledge and advice. However, some elements of the discourse on parenthood were not negotiated in the forum. Users do not see childhood as a critical period that requires particular or constant attention neither do they exchange ideas on practices that could boost children’s cognitive capabilities. These findings indicate that macro-level change needs to be validated by analysis of individual level data.

Finally, scholars repeatedly emphasized that cultural models are relevant for the reproduction of social inequality. Yet, the study of parenting culture was relatively isolated from research on social inequality. Moreover, the relationship between cultural models and social inequality was rarely elaborated and often only touched upon briefly. The third article assessed how the lack of cultural knowledge and resources can lead to unequal participation in activities promoted by the cultural model. The case in point is organized activities for preschool children which have been shown to affect school grades and cognitive development (Hille and Schupp 2015). The analysis confirmed that participation rates are structured by parents’ monetary resources and social class background. More affluent and educated parents with service class jobs provide their children with several organized activities, while their less well-resourced and educated

counterparts with working class jobs struggle to enroll their children in a comparable number and variety of activities.

In sum, this dissertation studied cultural patterns of parenthood at a time of changing demands. In recent years, the scholarly literature on cultural models of parenthood was loosely by a perspective that was termed parenting culture studies (Lee, Bristow et al. 2014). However, the development of the field was inhibited by several issues. First, the vagueness of the research program impeded the identification and organization of prospective research questions. This means that studies are accumulating but there is rarely an exchange of ideas that spans disciplines and methodological schools. Second, parenting culture studies either studied macro- or micro-level processes; there was little interaction between both perspectives. Third, quantitative approaches were, by and large, not incorporated into the field. This also included innovative methods from CSS, which have been specifically adopted to study culture (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013, Lee and Martin 2015). Finally, the relationship between cultural models of parenthood and the reproduction of social inequality was mainly unexplored.

The project tackled these issues in several ways and thus expanded the study of cultural models of parenthood. The literature was organized using an overarching research framework that allowed me to identify open questions. These unresolved issues included the longitudinal description of cultural models on the macro level, which I resolved by applying innovative methods of CSS. Moreover, I used a parenting online forum to bridge the macro-micro divide. Finally, an article explored the relevance of cultural models for the reproduction of social inequalities.

Nonetheless, there are still several open questions and also limitations to the approach developed in this thesis. First of all, even though the applied CSS methods made large text corpora manageable and provided a way to combine quantitative and qualitative perspectives on the data, there is a clear need for further work on their properties and applicability (Chang,

Gerrish et al. 2009). In the respective papers, a number of steps were taken to ensure “*substantive fit*” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 286, emphasis in original) but finding the “right” number of topics is still an interpretative decision that needs further exploration (Chang, Gerrish et al. 2009). In addition, further validation of the modeling results should ideally involve several researchers (ibid.).

What is more, the text data used in the respective studies allowed for a detailed mapping of topics (over time) but the samples were selected deliberately and as such do not permit the estimation of population parameters. A deeper integration of CSS methods and survey research would make a useful addition to the sociological study of parenthood. This would make it possible to account for the fuzziness of cultural models but, at the same time, enable researchers to estimate their distribution in the population (Diabaté and Lück 2014: 63f.). Moreover, representative surveys could be used to assess the generalizability of digital data (Zagheni, Weber et al. 2017, Salganik 2018: 117-130).

The research program was adapted from Diabaté and Lück (2014) and adjusted so that I could study parenting culture. The framework enabled me to identify open questions and theoretical associations. However, research needs to work further on the theoretical underpinnings of cultural models. The literature often relies on the sociology of knowledge or discourse theory to theorize cultural models. Yet, this work is rather exploratory and does not constitute a suitable theory enabling researchers to infer hypothesis.

Finally, future work should apply cross-country comparisons in order to address the specificity of their respective cases. The capabilities of machine translation software are progressing rapidly (Lucas, Nielsen et al. 2015: 259f.). In addition, methods such as topic models are “language agnostic” (ibid.: 261) and rarely require the full nuance of the written word (Lee and Martin 2015: 12). Accordingly, cross-country comparisons seem feasible and future studies should explore varieties of the recalibration of parenthood. For instance, the literature indicates

that parenting support programs have been developed in several countries (Daly 2013a). Yet, it would be of great relevance to analyze how country traditions shape the specific implementation of such programs (Bennett 2005, Jensen 2009) and, in turn, cultural models of parenthood (Keller, Lamm et al. 2006).

In conclusion, the project showed how different data and innovative methods can be used to address questions on cultural models of parenthood at a time of changing norms. How parents approach their childrearing is a question of individual resources and knowledge but it also depends on societal expectations and norms. Such norms were conceptualized through the “missing link” (Diabaté, Ruckdeschel et al. 2015) of cultural models. By doing so, I was able to expand approaches that focus on individual action to account for larger societal developments. The respective papers conducted such analyses using empirical data that opened possible pathways for future research.

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PAPER I: A Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy: Applying a
Topic Model to Map Reform and Public Discourse, 1990-2016

A Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy: Applying a Topic Model to Map Reform and Public Discourse, 1990–2016

Abstract

This article explores the newspaper discourse surrounding a paradigm shift in social policy. The case at hand, Germany, is a prime example of a welfare state that was particularly resistant to reform. Hence, the rapid paradigm shift in German family policy since the late 1990s is puzzling. This study seeks to resolve this puzzle by drawing on the insight that public discourse is crucial for policy change. Politicians have to promote reforms prior to their implementation. The main channel for communication with the wider public is the mass media. I use newspaper coverage from 1990 to 2016 to analyze whether the media is responsive to reform initiatives. The analytical approach utilizes topic modeling an innovative method from the computational social sciences (CSS). The analysis shows that public discourse was responsive to the parliamentary debate. The article also clarifies the role of critical events and identifies discursive strategies. In particular, the comparatively low scores obtained by German pupils in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were a critical event. Policymakers used the momentum generated by the “PISA shock” to legitimize and push for a comprehensive reform of the German family policy system.

Keywords: early childhood education and care (ECEC), family policies, topic models, discourse analysis, mass media, critical events

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that the German family policy system and, in particular, its early childhood education and care (ECEC) system has experienced an unexpected paradigm shift since the late 1990s (Ostner 2010, Seeleib-Kaiser 2016: 225). In 1998, future German chancellor Gerhard Schröder spoke rudely of his colleague and later federal minister for family affairs Christine Bergmann as being “responsible for women and all that other nonsense” (Klinkhammer 2014: 228, translated). Shortly after, however, it was recognized that “family policies and education belong to the most important areas of investment” (Brettschneider 2008: 26).

This change is even more surprising given that the family is a highly normative and sensitive concept (Blum 2010). Moreover, the German Bismarckian welfare state was once seen as notoriously difficult to reform (Ostner 2010: 214f., Seeleib-Kaiser 2016) and as such “a critical case for the study of welfare state change” (Fleckenstein 2011: 546). Even today, scholars have been surprised by the rapid political and discursive change in the institutions surrounding families and childhood (Seeleib-Kaiser 2016, Ostner, Betz et al. 2017).

In this article, I intend to address this issue by analyzing the public discourse that accompanied the reform initiatives. Some scholars have noted that public discourse is a crucial element in explaining policy reform, as it might create windows of opportunity for change (Schmidt 2002, Ostner 2008: 58). In democratic states, the private sphere is, at least to a certain extent, protected from governmental interventions. This also holds for Germany where the “principle of subsidiarity” shields families from governmental intervention (Seeleib-Kaiser 2002: 27). Consequently, the German family policy landscape has been described as “locked-in and hard to overcome” (Knijn and Ostner 2008: 88). In such settings, communication and timing are

crucial for successful reform initiatives (Schmidt 2002, Mätzke and Ostner 2010: 470f., Ritzi and Kaufmann 2014: 100f.). The main communication channel for politicians and the wider public is the mass media (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009: 306).

In the following, I use articles published in four German national newspapers and magazines (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Spiegel Magazine*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*) to analyze whether their reporting was responsive to the political debate, reforms and critical events. In particular, I use two core themes in the debate on ECEC in Germany, namely “early childhood education” and “early learning support”, to create a data corpus. This data set allows a detailed mapping of the change in policy and public discourse over time, which enables me to pin down the temporal order of shifts in public discourse and policy implementation.

While simple keywords can offer some impressions of the salience of the topics, they are rather crude measures. Most terms in the political debate do not have a fixed meaning but are subject to the power struggles that emerge around “the legitimate view of the social world” (Bourdieu 1985: 731). They derive their meaning from the context they appear in (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013: 578). Accordingly, I apply a more advanced approach by using an innovative method known as topic modeling (Blei 2012), which is well-established in political science but not yet frequently used in family sociology. This approach helps to identify themes in large text corpora and avoids the assumption that simple keywords capture the content of articles. More importantly, it enables me to model how topical prevalences changed from 1990 to 2016.

2. BACKGROUND

In the following, I provide an overview of the German family policy landscape from 1990 to 2016 in order to clarify how much change occurred and what type of change it was (Béland and Powell 2016: 129). In the subsequent section, I will highlight why public discourse matters for reform initiatives and what we can learn about it by studying newspapers. Throughout, I will refer to Figure 1, which provides information on family policy legislation.

The figure also includes critical events that have been discussed as enabling political reform (Schmidt 2002). They are defined as “sudden, relatively rare events that spark intense media and public attention because of their sheer magnitude, or sometimes because of the harm they reveal” (Birkland 2016: 215). Following the literature, I regard the debate on the crisis of the welfare state (Brettschneider 2008: 30f.) and the “PISA shock” (Augustin-Dittmann 2010: 63f., Maas 2016) as critical events, however, I will later empirically scrutinize whether they actually played a decisive role.

2.1 Policy Background

The (West)⁷ German family policy system was mainly put in place to stabilize the division of labor known as the male-breadwinner model (Stiller 2010: 183f., Fleckenstein 2011). This model rests on the assumption that (married) women should prioritize childcare above labor once they have children (Klammer and Letablier 2007: 674). Consequently, social policies were tailored towards a mother as a primary caregiver. A case in point is the long but low paid parental leave scheme that kept the primary care-giver – almost always the mother – dependent on the breadwinner (Pfau-Effinger and Smidt 2011: 222). This dependency was amplified by the lack of public childcare. The legal entitlement to public childcare for three-year-olds was not in force until 1996 (Klinkhammer 2014: 184).

In general, the German welfare state relied “on the family, that is, the housewife, as a provider of social services” (Seeleib-Kaiser 2002: 27) and was, hence, characterized by a high degree of “familialization” (Ostner 2010: 220). Moreover, family policy concerns were “traditionally weak in national political debates” (Clasen 2007: 138) and had a low level of institutionalization (ibid.: 139).

⁷ In the following, I will not discuss the differences between East and West Germany in detail. Even though these are still apparent, my analysis focuses on the national level and discourses apparent in national newspapers.

Figure 1. German government, family-policy output, and critical events⁸

	1991–1994	1994–1998	1998–2002	2002–2005	2005–2009	2009–2013	2013–2017
Govern- ment	Christian Democrats/Free Democrats	Christian Democrats/Free Democrats	Social Democrats/Greens	Social Democrats/Greens	Christian Democrats/ Social Democrats	Christian Democrats/Free Democrats	Christian Democrats/Social Democrats
Enacted laws	<p>Reform of child and youth services (<i>Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz</i>), January 1991</p> <p>Legal entitlement to a daycare place for three-year-olds (<i>SGB VIII §24</i>), July 1992</p>		<p>Parental leave reform (<i>Bundeserziehungsgeldgesetz</i>), January 2001</p>	<p>Investment pact “Future of education and care” (<i>IZBB</i>), May 2003</p> <p>Daycare expansion act (<i>Tagesbetreuungsbaugesetz, TAG</i>), January 2005</p>	<p>Wage replacement benefit for childcare (<i>Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz, BEEG</i>), January 2007</p> <p>Qualification initiative “Advancement through education” (<i>Qualifizierungsinitiative “Aufstieg durch Bildung”</i>), October 2008</p> <p>Childcare funding act (<i>Kinderförderungsgesetz, KiFöG</i>), December 2008</p>	<p>Childcare allowance (<i>Betreuungsgeld</i>), February 2013 (overruled July 2015)</p>	<p>Parental allowance (<i>Elterngeld Plus</i>), January 2015</p>
Critical events		<p>↑ Crisis of the welfare state</p>	<p>↑ PISA shock</p>				

⁸ The figure includes core family policies and critical events at the national level as discussed in Klinkhammer (2014), Olk (2007), and Blum (2017). However, Ostner and Stolberg (2015) also observe “a mushrooming of local model projects during the last fifteen years” (626), which are excluded here.

The rhetoric surrounding the male-breadwinner model changed considerably during the 1990s, and in particular when the Social Democrats and Greens entered government in 1998 (Klinkhammer 2014: 223-229). In the late 1990s, a perceived crisis of the German welfare state highlighted shortcomings in different social policy areas, including family policy, which came to be seen as offering extremely poor value for money (Ostner 2010: 224).

The social investment paradigm was identified as a possible solution. In light of this perspective, it was said that “family policies and education belong to the most important areas of investment” (Brettschneider 2008: 26) and children became a primary target group (Olk 2007, Esping-Andersen 2008). The social investment paradigm emphasizes that “social policies should be seen as a productive factor, essential to economic and to employment growth” (Morel, Palier et al. 2012: 2). The main goals of social policy are then to create human capital and to stimulate continuous female labor market participation (ibid.).

The Schröder administration (1998–2005) followed this approach by emphasizing gender equality, work-life balance, and an extension of ECEC during the election battle and later in their coalition agreement (Klinkhammer 2014: 223-229). Still, the policy output during their first term was rather modest (Blum 2017: 321f.). This changed with the onset of the “PISA shock” (Klinkhammer 2014: 253). The low scores obtained by German school students in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) spawned a heated reform debate and became a critical event in the German debate (Ostner 2010: 224, Klinkhammer 2014: 253-258); this issue was also covered extensively by the press (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009: 312, Maas 2016).

Both narratives, the social investment paradigm and the failure of the German educational system, gave politicians leeway to propose sustainable family policies (“nachhaltige Familienpolitik”) as a possible solution (Klinkhammer 2014: 353-355). Sustainable family policies set out to increase the low fertility rate, ensure the fast (re-)integration of mothers into

the labor market, and expand ECEC provision (Gruescu and Rürup 2005, BMFSFJ 2006). Policies in line with this approach were legitimized with reference to “the economic charm of family” (“der ökonomische Charme der Familie”) (Ristau 2005), clearly echoing arguments from the social investment paradigm (Ostner 2008).

A case in point is the wage replacement benefit for childcare (“Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz”, BEEG) of 2007 which aimed to increase fertility rates by lowering the associated opportunity costs and ensure a fast re-integration of mothers in the labor market (Bujard 2013: 140). It replaced the flat-rate benefit with a wage-related component of 67% of previous earnings (capped at €1,800 per month), which is paid for twelve months (up to fourteen months when the partner takes two months of leave) (Blum 2017: 325). This policy instrument supports “the idea of the working mother who only interrupts work for a short period after childbirth” (Klammer and Letablier 2007: 688) and can be described as “de-familializing” (Ostner 2010: 219). Together with the massive expansion of ECEC facilities for under-threes (“Kinderförderungsgesetz”, KiFöG) the wage replacement benefit for childcare constitutes a distinct “break with the traditional family policy guided by the male breadwinner ideology” (Fleckenstein 2011: 553).

The ideas and narratives of sustainable family policies were also maintained when the first grand coalition entered government in 2005 (Henninger and von Wahl 2010). In fact, Ursula von der Leyen, the Christian Democratic minister for family affairs even accelerated the implementation of such policies (ibid.). However, the modernizing trajectory of German family policy also prompted a backlash among conservative actors that is apparent in the debate on the German childcare allowance⁹ (“Betreuungsgeld”) (Henninger and von Wahl 2015).

⁹ The childcare allowance (“Betreuungsgeld”) was a highly controversial policy initiative by the Federal Government (CDU/CSU and FDP) that provided monetary subsidies for families that raise their children at home without use of public daycares (cash-for-care benefit). The law was passed in November 2012 but scrapped by the Federal Constitutional Court in July 2015. However, some federal states such as Bavaria still provide a childcare allowance.

In sum, German family policy experienced a phase of modernization and high political activity from 2002 to 2009. The male-breadwinner model was replaced by the dual-earner model, while family-centered childhood gave way to the “scholarized” childhood (Klinkhammer 2014: 517-543). One could also speak of a “de-familialization” of German family policy (Ostner 2010).

In the terminology of Hall (1993), the German system of family policy underwent a third-order change (Seeleib-Kaiser 2016: 225). Not only did new policies evolve and their rationale change (for an overview: Blum 2017); the way we think and talk about families and children also changed (Betz and De Moll 2013, Klinkhammer 2014). After 2009, most policies and debates still centered on achieving sustainable family policy goals, however, policy output leveled off during the second and third term of Angela Merkel’s administration (2009–2017).

2.2 Public discourse and policy reform

Having established that Germany experienced a paradigm shift in the field of family policy, I now review studies that address the role of public discourse in welfare state adjustment. Most social policy studies have emphasized that welfare states are rather resilient in the face of external pressure to reform (Stiller 2010: 10-14). In fact, Germany “was long considered the example *par excellence* of institutional and political resilience to change” (ibid., emphasis in original: 9-10). As such, Germany constitutes a critical case for explaining welfare state adjustment (Fleckenstein 2011: 546).

However, as previously discussed, far-reaching reform did eventually occur. Recent studies seeking to explain this change have underscored the role of discourse (Schmidt 2002, Schmidt and Radaelli 2004). In this research, scholars have studied which “discursive strategies” (Gerhards 1992: 310) increase the probability of successful reform. They stress that reform initiatives are more likely to succeed when they are presented as cognitively reasonable *and* normatively sound (Schmidt 2002: 170, Brettschneider 2009: 190f.). More specifically,

Gerhards (1992) identifies five dimensions of political discourse that can be used to influence public opinion. This occurs when political actors (i) manage to frame a topic as a social problem, (ii) identify the cause and origin of their issue, (iii) refer to an agent capable of inducing change, (iv) interpret their concern as likely to succeed, and, finally (v) present themselves as a legitimate actor in the field (Gerhards 1992: 308, see also: Knijn and Ostner 2008: 82f.).

These strategies can be used to influence public opinion. The precondition for their use, however, is public attention (Gerhards 1992: 307). It is more difficult to politicize an issue that is of low salience than it is to use the momentum of a critical event. Such “events can lead (...) members of the public to pay attention to new problems or pay greater attention to existing but dormant (...) problems” (Birkland 2016: 216). In short, they are “important mobilization opportunities” (ibid.). Consequently, the timing of reform initiatives constitutes another crucial ingredient in successful policy change (Mätzke and Ostner 2010: 470f.).

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between communicative and coordinative discourse (Schmidt 2002: 172f.). Communicative discourse is more prevalent in single-actor systems, where the administration tries to reach out to the public in order to seek support after reform (ibid.: 172). In contrast, multi-actor systems like the German system are more likely to feature coordinative discourse between political actors (ibid.). Here, communicative discourse is more visible during election periods when policy elites seek “to reframe the coordinative discourse” (ibid.).

“Discourse, in short, matters” (ibid.: 190) for welfare state adjustment. This is particularly applicable in the family policy field, where discourse matters not only for reform initiatives but is also key in changing family’s attitudes (Knijn and Ostner 2008: 80). Yet, scholars studying discourse often limit themselves to analyzing parliamentary debates (Klinkhammer 2014) or political documents (Prior, Hughes et al. 2012, Betz, de Moll et al. 2013). Whether or not

citizens are knowledgeable about these sources is debatable at best. These sources can instead be regarded as a part of the coordinative discourse among policy elites. Hence, I argue that newspaper coverage is a better way to explore the relationship between public discourse and policy reform.

In general, journalists are expected to observe how other societal systems, such as politics, operate. Their function is the “constant generation and processing of irritation” (Luhmann 2000: 98). In his opening statement, Luhmann (2000) even goes as far as to say that “[w]hatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media” (1). Hence, newspaper coverage plays a key role in mediating between politics and the wider public (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009). Citizens receive information on the political system primarily from the mass media (Gerhards 1999: 148).

In line with this, empirical studies indicate that newspaper coverage is sensitive to societal and political change (Gerhards 1999, DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013, Schröder and Vietze 2015). Nonetheless, the relationship between mass media and politics is still a rather under-researched topic (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009: 314). This might partly be explained by the fact that media archives were not digitized and easily accessible until very recently (Schröder and Vietze 2015: 44).

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the following, I analyze whether public discourse, as measured by media coverage, was responsive to the parliamentary debate. More specifically, I explore whether public discourse helped to open a window of opportunity for policymakers to pursue reform in the field of family policy. In order to address this question, I apply Gerhards (1992) work on the dimensions of political discourse as a heuristic to scrutinize discursive strategies. Moreover, I assume that reform related topics are more prevalent in the run up to major reforms and legislation. Finally,

I expect critical events such as the PISA shock to drive public discourse (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009: 312, Klinkhammer 2014: 253).

4. DATA, METHODS, AND MODEL EVALUATION

4.1 Selection of articles

In this section, I introduce my database, method, and model evaluation strategy. In order to analyze the public discourse accompanying political reforms, I gathered newspaper articles that were published in print issues of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Spiegel Magazine*, and *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (see Table 1). I decided to include these newspapers and weeklies because they have a nationwide reach. Furthermore, as newspapers of record, they influence coverage by other media outlets.¹⁰ The sources also span the left-right political spectrum (Donsbach, Wolling et al. 1996, Eilders 2004).

Table 1. Main characteristics of the sample

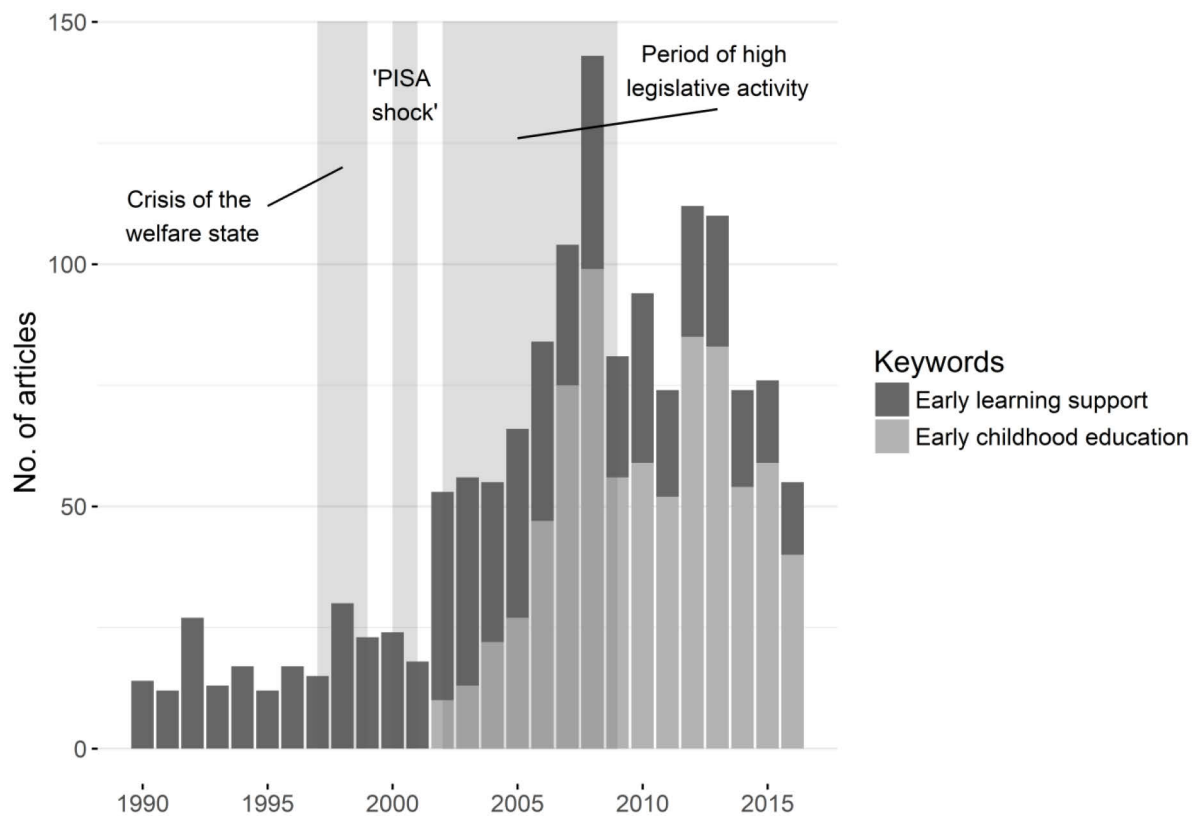
Newspaper	Type (issued)	Data availability	Sold editions (4 th quarter)		Political leaning
			1990	2016	
Spiegel Magazine	News magazine (weekly)	1990–2016	1,087,304	777,877 -39,77%	Center-left
Süddeutsche Zeitung	Daily newspaper (Mo-Sat)	1992–2016	383.392	367,579 -4,30%	Center
Frankfurter Allgemeine (incl. Sonntagszeitung)	Daily newspaper (Mo-Sun)	1990–2016	342,721	253,883 -34,99%	Center-right
Die Zeit	Newspaper (weekly)	1990–2016	487,191	504,331 +3.39%	Center

Following the model of the two-step flow of communication as proposed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson et al. (1960[1944]: 150-158), these newspapers and magazines can be expected to

¹⁰ This claim is substantiated by Weischenberg, Malik et al. (2006) who report that the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Spiegel Magazin*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, and *Die Zeit* are the press outlets most frequently used by German journalists.

have an impact that exceeds their readership figures because they are disseminated by “opinion leaders”. Their model posits that “ideas often flow *from* radio and print *to* the opinion leaders and *from* them to the less active sections of the population” (Lazarsfeld, Berelson et al. 1960[1944]: 151, emphasis in original). Thus, even in light of an unfolding “newspaper crisis” (Schnibben 2013) with declining readership, newspapers and magazines are still a key factor in the formation of public opinion. Finally, all of them provide a digitized archive.

Figure 2. Number of articles by keyword over time



With respect to the research question, I selected two keywords. One was “Frühförderung” (early learning support) and the other “Frühk* Bildung*” (early childhood education), with both referring to social investment strategies.¹¹ The search terms were also chosen because

¹¹ The asterisk makes sure that different endings of the words are also considered and the quotation marks maintain that both words follow each other directly.

the expansion of ECEC facilities constitutes a core theme of several reform initiatives (Clasen 2007: 163f., Augustin-Dittmann 2010, Seeleib-Kaiser 2016: 225). Furthermore, more general search terms (i.e., “kindergarten,” “family policy”) provided results that were difficult to disentangle or left me with a large number of articles associated with other fields. My approach left me with 1,459 articles. The number of articles by keyword over time is depicted in Figure 2 above.

The graph shows that most articles using the search terms were published after 2001. In fact, no article before 2002 contained the keyword “Frühkindliche Bildung” (early childhood education) ($N_{\text{total}} = 781$). This term started appearing in 2002. After that, however, its prevalence increased continuously until 2008. In contrast, the prevalence of the search term “Frühförderung” (early learning support) ($N_{\text{total}} = 678$) varied little over time but was present throughout the observation period. This finding already indicates change concerning the discussion of ECEC.

In Germany, ECEC is a relatively new discourse that warrants further analysis. As the literature review has shown, early childhood and educational goals were relatively separate until the advent of the social investment paradigm. The first minor peak coincides with the election of the Social Democrats and Greens in 1998. However, the largest growth in articles on early learning support and early childhood education follows the publication of the results of the PISA study. This event has been described as one that enabled discursive (and political) change (Klinkhammer 2014: 253-279). Subsequently, the number of articles published on this topic grew steadily until the end of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s first term in office. This period was characterized by high legislative activity, as discussed above. During her second term, however, the issue slightly declined in prominence before growing in relevance again. Recently, the number of articles has once again decreased.

4.2 Identification of topics

The description of the sample has already shown that the attention ECEC attracted varied substantially from 1990 to 2016. However, keywords only provide tentative descriptive information on topic salience. For instance, the articles in the newspaper corpus may be only tangentially related to the keywords. Moreover, words derive their meaning from their context (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013: 578). A discussion of early learning support in relation to disabilities is quite different from one that regards it as a strategy to mitigate social inequalities. Hence, it is necessary to apply a more advanced modeling technique of textual analysis.

I used topic modeling to identify thematically coherent topics in the large text corpus (Blei 2012). Topic models are part of a family of methods that have been labeled computational social sciences (CSS) (Heiberger and Riebling 2016). CSS provides a toolkit of methods aimed at processing large and often relatively unstructured data, as is the case with newspaper archives (ibid.). The underlying algorithm known as latent dirichlet allocation (LDA) (Blei, Ng et al. 2003), data preparation and my model evaluation strategy are described in the Appendix.

The particular model used to identify topics in the newspaper corpus is known as the structural topic model (STM) (Roberts, Stewart et al. 2016). It is an extension of the LDA algorithm developed by Blei, Ng et al. (2003) and allows for the incorporation of metadata into the modeling process (Roberts, Stewart et al. 2016). The model has been used successfully to study beliefs on climate change (Mildenberger and Tingley 2017) or respondents' understandings of the political left-right scale (Bauer, Barberá et al. 2017).

5. RESULTS

In the following, I will describe the results produced by the topic model. The year of publication was included as metadata in order to model the prevalence of topics over time.¹² Table 2 summarizes the results including the chosen labels, highly associated words and topic proportion over all documents. I provide “un-stemmed” words in column 3 to facilitate interpretation and readability. Frequently observed words in highly associated documents were used to achieve this task. In addition, the words were translated from German. At this level of abstraction (bag-of-words assumption), this approach is considered unproblematic (Lucas, Nielsen et al. 2015: 260).

At first sight, some topics seem to be closely aligned and many terms are present in multiple topics (i.e. *child*). This, however, is a common feature of topic models and is a strength rather than a weakness as it makes it possible to “disambiguate different uses of a term, based on the context (other terms) in which it appears” (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013: 578). As previously mentioned, it makes quite a difference whether childhood is discussed in relation to early learning support (topic 8) or as a potential vehicle to mitigate social inequalities (topic 1).

5.1 Topics in the German debate on ECEC over time

In the remainder of the section, I will describe the resulting topics and their prevalence throughout the observation period. However, I will exclude topics that are unrelated to my research question and relate to miscellaneous themes. This is the case for topic 2 “Event notes in newspapers” and topic 5 “Business news”. Note that these topics are also the least prominent ones (see last column of Table 2).

¹² The variable was included using a B-spline with 10 degrees of freedom. This function is included in the *stm* package (Roberts, Stewart et al. 2018).

Table 2. Topics, topic labels, associated words and estimated topic proportions

No.	Label	Associated words (fifteen highest)	Topic proportions (percent)
1	Education as a solution to social inequality	percent, Germany, German, state, education, person, increase, strong, social, child, young, youth, Merkel (Angela), inequality, study	7.1
2	Event notes in newspapers	time, child, old, new, city, school, huge, politics, music, culture, first, Munich, day, person	5.9
3	Investments in education in coalition agreements	CDU (Christian Democratic Union), SPD (Social Democratic Party), euros, FDP (Free Democratic Party), Die Grünen (The Greens), new, party, CSU (Christian Social Union), politics, million, education, state, percent, coalition, child	16.3
4	Acquisition of language	child, parent, school, teach, kindergarten, first, language, mother, early, old, new, early learning support, German, huge, possible	11.5
5	Business news	German, second, huge, school, new, young, PLC (public limited company), Germany, clever, percent, company, first, quarter, person, today	3.5
6	Educational policy between state and governmental responsibility	school, education, state, child, German, teach, Germany, new, Bund (federal government), educational policy, early childhood, percent, support, primary school, CDU (Christian Democratic Union)	19.8
7	Childcare between parental and public responsibility	child, parent, educate, family, education, kindergarten, percent, woman, Germany, care, early childhood, German, Euro, nursery teacher, crèche	25.8
8	Early learning support of children with disabilities	disabled, child, early support, Lebenshilfe (a charitable organization), new, person, society, D-mark, school, city, institution, foundation, million, work, mental	14.6
9	Families in challenging situations	child, mother, parent, family, woman, young, old, live, first, father, huge, physician, today, day, son	5.5

In order to facilitate the presentation of my results, I arranged the remaining topics in two groups (see Table 3). One group consists of topics that are more or less unrelated to governmental action while the second group of topics connects to the role of the state. To be clear, this specific grouping of topics is an interpretive decision that was not forced by the model. Still, all the topics in group II feature terms that deal with state action (*state*, *coalition*, *Bund*); this connection is absent from topics in group I. Hence, even if the grouping is an interpretive decision, the model backs up my decision.

Table 3. Grouping of topics based on the relation to governmental action

Group I	Group II
Lesser role of state action	Greater role of state action
(T4) Acquisition of language	(T1) Education as a solution to social inequality
(T8) Early learning support of children with disabilities	(T3) Investments in education in coalition agreements
(T9) Families in challenging situations	(T6) Educational policy between state and governmental responsibility
	(T7) Childcare between parental and public responsibility

In sum, the topics in group 1 relate to the “classic” understanding of early learning support, which was put in place to provide services for families in challenging situations and disabled children (SGB VIII §10 (4), §35a). However, the significance of these topics decreased dramatically around the turn of the century as shown in Figure 3. This decline coincided with the advent of the discourse on early childhood education, as depicted in Figure 2.

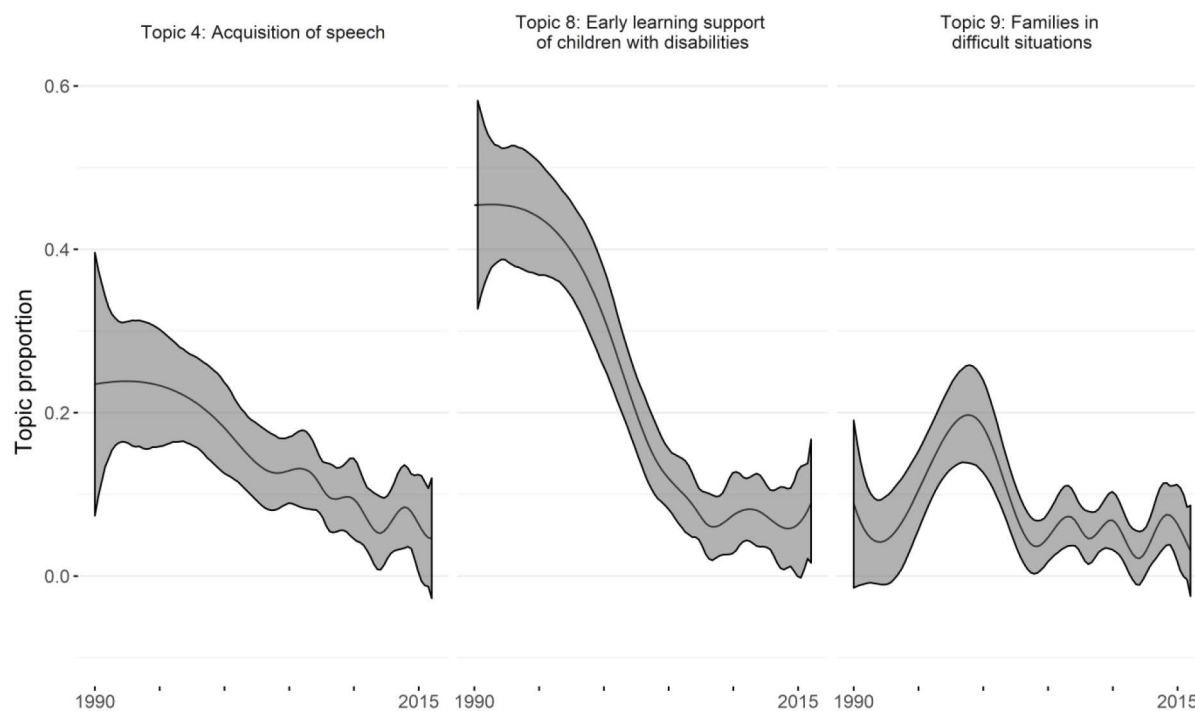
Still, articles featuring early learning support did not vanish entirely from the press coverage. Instead, the term “early learning support” was no longer only applied to children with disabilities. Today, early learning support is a practice that is presented as suitable for any child. But before the turn of the century, early learning support was politically perceived as a less-than-ideal

solution for families or children with “problems” (Klinkhammer 2014: 518). This shift of meaning is illustrated in an article from 2010 in which a book critical of this development is reviewed:

The authors dispense with yet another myth: the idea of early learning support for healthy children. The expression alone pathologizes the free development of humans. Until age six, children need time to play, to move, and to explore the environment undisturbed (Rasche 2010: 18, translated).

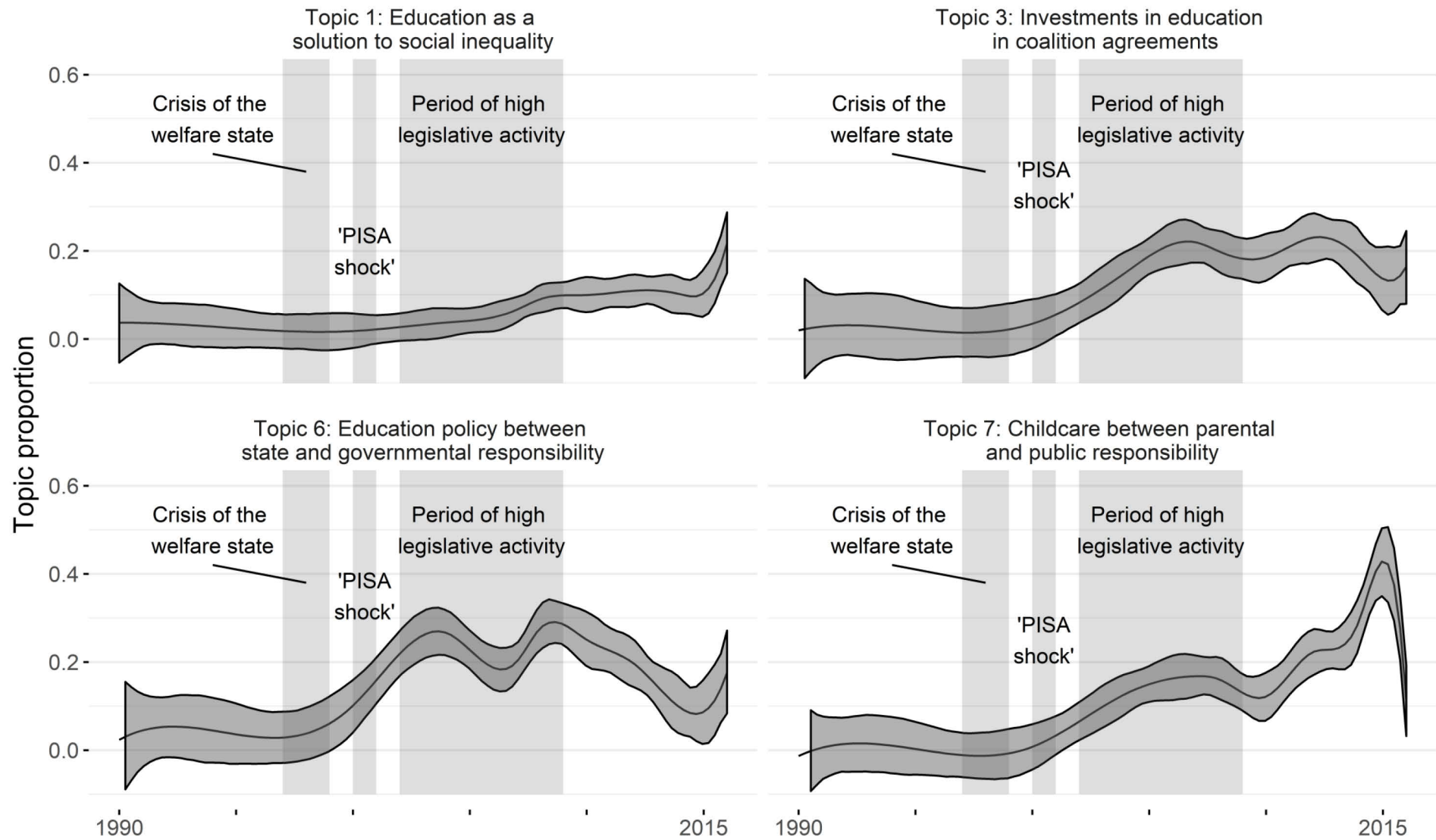
The article clearly shows that journalists and professionals working in the field also recognize this shift in meaning.

Figure 3. Topic prevalence of group 1 by date (including 95% CI), 1990–2016



Next, I turn to the topics that presuppose governmental action. Their prevalence over time is displayed in Figure 4. In addition, I highlight critical events and the period between 2002 and 2009, which was characterized by high legislative activity.

Figure 4. Topic prevalence of group 2 by date (including 95% CI), 1990-2016



The figure shows that the PISA shock marks the beginning of a period characterized by a renegotiation of childcare arrangements. Both the division of responsibilities between the federal government and German states (topic 6) and the role of parental and public childcare (topic 7) were discussed and re-evaluated. Moreover, education was presented as a possible solution to social inequality (topic 1). Finally, topic 3 discusses “investment in education in coalition agreements.” The “crisis of the welfare state,” however, does not appear to be a discernible marker, which might be explained by the fact that “socio-economic change does not typically translate ‘automatically’ into ideational and policy change” (Fleckenstein 2011: 546).

It is interesting to note how closely the newspaper discourse followed parliamentary debates in the family policy field. For instance, the spikes that appear in topic 7 “Childcare between parental and public responsibility” in 2012 and 2015 can be traced back to the debate surrounding the introduction of the childcare allowance and the final ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court. Moreover, the period of high political activity between 2002 and 2009 clearly left its mark.

Topic 6 is comprised of articles that discuss the division of responsibility for the expansion of ECEC between the federal states and the government. The topic was most prominent around 2003 and 2008. In both cases, the federal government debated or passed bills that brought about a massive expansion of public facilities for children and school students (2003: Investment pact “Future of education and care”; 2008: child expansion act, KiFöG, see Figure 1). Both programs were criticized by the German states (*Länder*) as they feared the associated costs. At the same time, Annette Schavan, the former federal minister of education and research expressed her objection to a 2006 reform to Germany’s division of powers that transferred responsibility for educational policy back to the federal states. In sum, this topic documents the significant political activity in these areas during the first grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD.

However, the individual topics do not overlap perfectly but rather follow their own trajectory to a certain degree. Topic 3, for instance, deals with coalition agreements and party manifestos that relate to early learning support and early education, even if some of these articles only discuss ECEC briefly. This topic was particularly prominent from 2005 to 2014. During that time, the grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD proposed and implemented major changes to the German family policy system. After this point, the topic still continued to score high on the newspaper agenda. This indicates that investment in early education continued to be a highly salient topic.

Topic 1, “Education as a solution to social inequality,” discusses the role of monetary investment in early childhood, which is presented as a solution to social inequalities. Most articles featured here were written by German economists such as Marcel Fratzscher, Ludger Wößmann, and Clemens Fuest. Even though they differ in their assessment of the extent of social inequalities, they agree that investment in early education is an instrument to mitigate them. The topic is one of the more prevalent ones today. The analysis hence confirms that economists not only became more important in the political debate but also in the mass media. Early childhood was revalued in light of economic factors.

5.2 Discursive strategies in the debate on ECEC in Germany

Having established that the newspaper coverage was responsive to political debates, I now turn to the content of the topics. In particular, I scrutinize the “discursive strategies” (Gerhards 1992: 310) apparent in the newspaper articles. For this purpose, I randomly sampled two articles per year from topic 7 “Childcare between private and public responsibility,” which is the most prominent topic. The sampling was restricted to articles that are highly associated with the topic in question (estimated topic proportion of at least 60%). This meant that I only sampled articles from 2002 to 2016. The resulting sample included 30 articles, which I read and coded in detail. This approach, which combines distant and close reading, has been termed “blended reading”

(Stulpe and Lemke 2016) as it uses “computers [to] *amplify* human abilities” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 270, emphasis in original).

The coding scheme incorporated Gerhards’ (1992: 308) discourse dimensions, which have been discussed above. Moreover, I included actors that are mentioned in the articles (both persons and organizations), (critical) events, the role ascribed to parents, and a code that was used to highlight country comparisons. Finally, the documents were grouped by their publication date in order to compare the discursive strategies from 2002 to 2016.

The main theme found in the close reading and coding of articles associated with topic 7 “Childcare between parental and public responsibility” is the role of formal education in early childhood. Associated issues include the quality of daycare facilities and the childcare allowance.

In the newspaper articles, the German system of ECEC is constructed as in urgent need of reform because of its poor performance as demonstrated by the low scores of German school students in the PISA study. The latter is clearly a critical event that served as a legitimizing concept in the reform of the German ECEC system. The study is directly mentioned in 7 out of 30 articles (i.e. 23.3%). In Gerhards (1992) terminology, early childhood education is the *topic* that was identified as a *social problem* as a result of the PISA study. This interpretive scheme was maintained by a coalition of policymakers and by scientists that are heavily featured in the press. These include economists, demographers, and educational researchers, some of which (i.e. Hans Bertram, Hans-Werner Sinn, Katharina Spieß) drew up reports for the government (Ostner 2007).

The PISA study, however, was descriptive and did not include policy recommendations (Maas 2016: 231f.). The analysis shows that the newspapers reported on family policies in other countries in order to identify causes and policy innovations. Scandinavian countries were

particularly prominent as examples of welfare states that manage to combine high female labor market participation and fertility rates. Identifying causes makes it more likely to engage the wider public (Gerhards 1992: 311f.). In one article, former federal minister Ursula von der Leyen is quoted as having said that

[W]e should rather measure ourselves against countries that have had an excellent system of early childhood education and care for decades. For instance, children from Scandinavian countries scored better in educational comparisons than children from Germany; the fertility rates are also higher there (Berth 2007: 1, translated).

Still, the suggested reasons for the PISA “debacle”, “disaster” or “misery” – to name but a few of the terms used to describe it – varied to some degree. Recurrent issues raised in the reporting are the separation of the German kindergarten and elementary education system, the low uptake of formal childcare by parents, and the low childcare quality. Moreover, the family model is characterized as outdated and too restrictive. In this vein, one article from 2004 criticizes that

kindergartens in Germany are far from constituting the first level of the education system.

Ultimately, the prevalent opinion here is that young children develop best when cared for by their mother (Melzer 2004: 43, translated).

Arguments of this type were apparent until 2007. Afterwards, the articles emphasized the need to include further disadvantaged groups in formal childhood education. Children at risk of not being educationally stimulated include those from migrant, poor, or low-educated families. Against this backdrop, the childcare allowance was seen as counterproductive as it may prevent the children who would benefit from early learning support from accessing it.

In recent years, the topic “Childcare between parental and public responsibility” has lost significance, as most articles have discussed the quality of formal childcare and the possibility to train daycare teachers at tertiary institutions. These articles also indicate that the expansion

of ECEC facilities in Germany has been completed. This is expressed by one article that underlines: “The legal entitlement to a daycare place, to all-day care, until recently, this was nothing more than an SPD–Green chimera” (Henzler 2013: 4).

Responsibility for implementing change is in all cases attributed to politicians and in particular, to the federal government. However, German states and municipalities are also included in some cases.

6. DISCUSSION

This articles set out to examine the newspaper discourse accompanying a paradigm shift in social policy. The case at hand, Germany, has been described as a welfare state that is particularly hard to reform. Nonetheless, comprehensive reform in the field of family policy did eventually occur. This shift is still considered difficult to explain.

The analysis contributed to this attempt at explanation by considering that discourse and timing matter for reform initiatives. By combining innovative quantitative and qualitative textual analysis methods, I showed that newspaper coverage could be productively used to map discourse, critical events, and policy implementation.

The fine-grained analysis indicated that the PISA study gave rise to a critical event that enabled policymakers to pressure for reform. In particular, the low scores of German school students in PISA allowed policymakers to overcome the separation of early childhood, which was hitherto considered a private issue for families, and the education system. Further arguments that were important in the debate were women’s comparatively low labor market participation and demographic considerations. Moreover, economic narratives were used to legitimize the reform. Many topics included research from economics and demography.

Solutions emerged through policy learning. The newspaper articles reported on country cases that were presented as success stories. The Scandinavian countries were taken as a case in point

that managed to combine high rates of female labor market integration and higher fertility rates. This kind of coverage helped to connect policy initiatives with desired outcomes in a “causal” narrative. The experience from the former German Democratic Republic, which was characterized by a high level of ECEC provision and fertility rates, however, was largely absent in the articles.

Interestingly, the analysis also indicated that the meaning of certain concepts was also affected by paradigm shifts. The concept of “early learning support”, which previously referred to programs for disabled children, is now considered a practice suitable for every child. Further analysis should explore whether this change in meaning has had repercussions for the provision of early learning support and the way professionals such as social workers see their job.

Even though, I could confirm that “[d]iscourse (...) matters” (Schmidt 2002: 190) there are still some open questions and research gaps: First, my sample was limited to high-brow newspapers and magazines. Following the model of the two-step flow of information developed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson et al. (1960[1944]), I assumed that these newspapers have a significance beyond their actual readership numbers. However, it would be desirable to include cases from the tabloid media such as *Bild*, which sells far more copies than the publications analyzed here. Unfortunately, this publication does not provide a digitized archive and is thus not easily accessible.

Secondly, the analysis provided a detailed account of public discourse and policy implementation. However, I cannot make causal claims. Other scholars have proposed explanations that stress ideational leadership (Stiller 2010) or party competition (Blome 2016). Still, this is partly due to the multifaceted nature of paradigm shifts (Ostner 2010). Further analyses should try to include these explanations to identify how different factors worked together to enable welfare state adjustment.

Finally, the article only featured the German case. A comparative approach could be a useful addition in order to disentangle how events such as the PISA study unfolded in other cases. This is especially relevant since welfare state adjustment did not only occur in Germany but was an event in different European states.

In sum, the article made a case for incorporating public discourse in explanations of social policy paradigm shifts. It has shown that newspaper articles are a useful source to explore public discourse and the framing of reform initiatives. In addition, it has demonstrated how innovative computational social science methods such as topic models can be applied to make large corpora manageable for social policy researchers without giving up on qualitative considerations.

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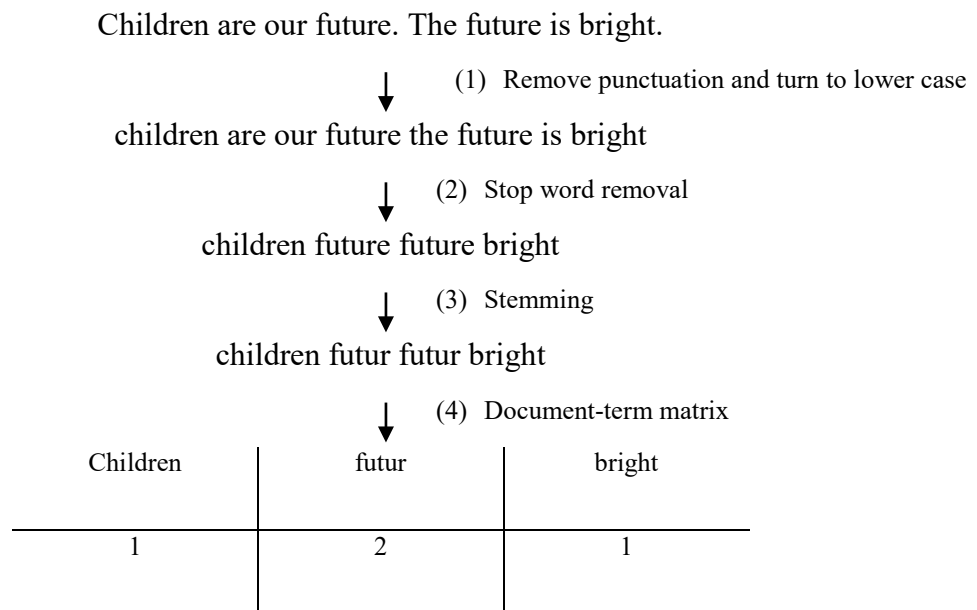
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APPENDIX: MODEL EVALUATION

In the Appendix, I characterize topic modeling as an approach that helps researchers to identify thematically coherent topics in large text corpora (Blei 2012). In particular, I provide an overview of the steps that enable the model to process the data and give a non-technical description of the underlying algorithm known as latent dirichlet allocation (LDA) (Blei, Ng et al. 2003). Moreover, I describe how I dealt with the common issue in the application of topic models, which is the need to specify the number of topics beforehand (Blei and Lafferty 2009: 11f.). Finally, model checking and evaluation are crucial parts of the modeling process (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). For this reason, I also include a detailed description of the evaluation process.

Figure 5. Preprocessing steps



The preprocessing turns documents into a document-term matrix (Lucas, Nielsen et al. 2015). This procedure involves several steps that are demonstrated using the sample sentence “Children are our future. The future is bright.” (see Figure 5).

First, the punctuation is removed and all words are turned to lower case. Second, common, repeated words that do not transmit a relevant meaning are deleted (*stop word removal*).¹³ Thirdly, the words are reduced to their root form (*stemming*). We are then left with something known as a “bag of words”. Finally, all documents are transformed into a sparse matrix known as document-term matrix. Each article now occupies one row and all words in the vocabulary occupy one column.

At first, this approach to textual analyses might seem bold. All nuance and richness of the document has been erased. However, from another point of view this can be considered an advantage. In this regard, Grimmer and Stewart (2013) underline: “Language is complex. But not all of language’s complexity is necessary to effectively analyze texts” (ibid.: 272). Other scholars have compared this approach to the construction of a map (Lee and Martin 2015: 12f.). Cartographic maps cannot incorporate all the details of a landscape but that is exactly what makes them useful. They make it possible to handle our data without imposing a certain interpretation (ibid.).

LDA assumes a generative process that created the documents in the corpus. This generative process can be illustrated in the following way (Blei 2012: 78f.): Suppose we are going to write a document on ECEC. Most likely, the article will touch on several topics that are associated with certain words (called vocabulary). One topic, labeled “cognitive development,” contains words like “brain, learning, neuroscience, development” and a second topic, “educators,” is associated with words such as “educators, training, professionalization, qualification”. Our article deals mainly with the first topic, such that words related to it will make up large proportions of the document. However, the role of “educators” will also be touched on briefly. Note that for a second article, the distribution of topics might be reversed. LDA assumes that

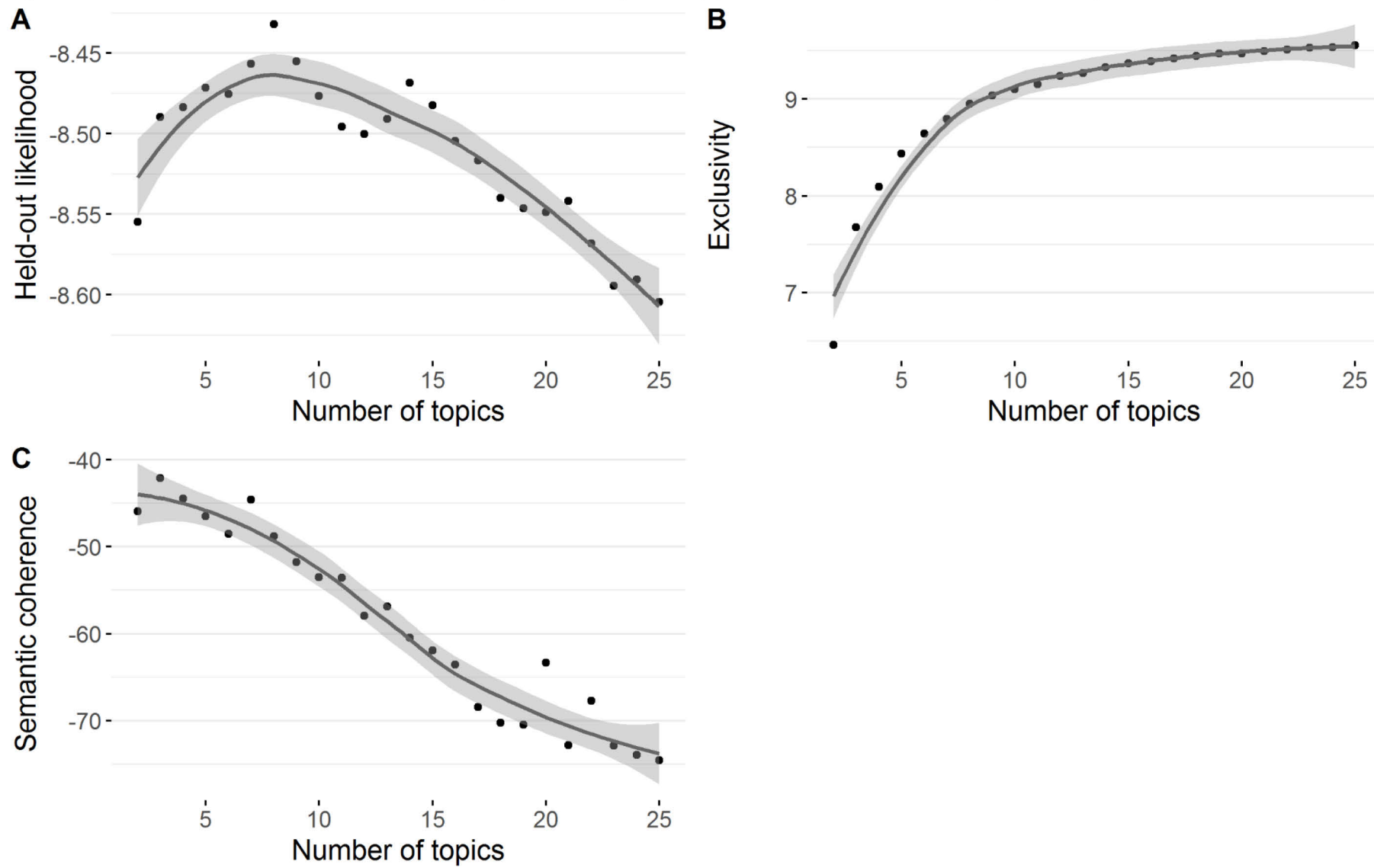
¹³ The analysis carried out here applies a slightly extended list of stop words which is available in the R package *quanteda* (Benoit, Watanabe et al. 2018).

“all the documents in the collection share the same set of topics, but each document exhibits those topics in different proportion” (Blei 2012: 79). Given the documents in our corpus, the task is then to reverse engineer the “*hidden structure*” (ibid.: 79, emphasis in original) that created it.

In my model evaluation strategy, I followed the approaches by Bail (2016), Roberts Margaret, Stewart Brandon et al. (2014), and Mimno, Wallach et al. (2011). It should be noted, however, that there is no definitive solution (Chang, Gerrish et al. 2009). Moreover, DiMaggio, Nag et al. (2013) underline that the interpretability of the resulting model should figure prominently in the model evaluation strategy as “[t]he point is not to estimate a population parameter correctly, but to identify the lens through which on can see the data most clearly” (582).

Concerning statistical criteria, I took (i) held-out likelihood, (ii) exclusivity, and (iii) semantic coherence into account. The computation, in this case of held-out likelihood involves leaving aside a certain proportion of documents (10%) in order to evaluate the predictive power of the final model on this “held-out” data (Hox 2017: 5f.). The exclusivity score measures how distinct topics are from each other. Finally, semantic coherence relies on the assumption that words subsumed under a topic should co-occur within documents. The criteria were derived by varying the number of topics from 2 to 25. The results are provided below in Figure 6. Panel A displays the held-out likelihood, panel B the exclusivity score, and panel C shows the results for semantic coherence respectively.

Figure 6. Model evaluation: held-out likelihood (A), exclusivity score (B) and semantic coherence (C) including a LOESS curve, $K = 2-25$



The figure can be summarized as follows: Held-out likelihood is found to be the highest for models with 7–9 topics. Exclusivity increases throughout the considered parameter space. However, it reaches a plateau for models with 9–11 topics. Finally, semantic coherence decreases strongly for models with more than ten topics. The opposing indications of exclusivity and semantic coherence are not surprising given that the exclusivity score was implemented to counterbalance the tendency of semantic coherence to select models with few and similar topics (Roberts Margaret, Stewart Brandon et al. 2014).

Based on the statistical criteria, I choose models with 8–10 topics for further qualitative analysis as proposed in DiMaggio, Nag et al. (2013). This involved reading articles that are highly associated with respective topics in order to assess their “*substantive fit*” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 286, emphasis in original). Through the iterative process of labeling and reading associated articles, the solution with nine topics was found to score best concerning interpretability and statistical criteria.

PAPER 2: Playground Chatter on the Internet? Models of “Good Parenting” in a Parent Online Forum

Published in Zeitschrift für Familienforschung/Journal of Family Research **30**(2): 151-175.

DOI: 10.3224/zff.v30i2.02

Sandkastengespräche im Netz?

Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“ in einem digitalen Elternforum

Abstract

Der explorative Artikel leistet einen Beitrag zur Forschung um Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“, indem untersucht wird, ob gegenwärtige Ansprüche aus Politik, Wissenschaft und Ratgeberliteratur innerhalb eines großen deutschen Elternforums diskutiert werden. Als Datenmaterial dienen 58,240 Nutzerbeiträge zu einer digitalen Diskussionsplattform. Anhand dieser digitalen Daten kann nicht nur analysiert werden, *welche* Themen die Nutzer besprechen, sondern auch *wie* sie diese verhandeln. Hierzu wird mit „topic modeling“ ein innovatives Verfahren der „computational social sciences“ (CSS) mit der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse kombiniert. Der Beitrag zeigt, dass insbesondere Expertenwissen von Nutzern aufgegriffen wird, um die eigene Erziehungspraxis zu rechtfertigen und zu reflektieren. Die Bezugnahmen sind in weiten Teilen positiv auch wenn einzelne Autoren kritisch betrachtet werden.

Schlagwörter: Elternforen, Erziehung, topic models, digitale Medien, Familienleitbilder

Playground chatter on the internet?

Models of “good parenting” in a parent online forum

Abstract

The explorative article contributes to research on models of “good parenting” by analyzing whether current demands of politics, science and advice literature are discussed in a large German parenting online forum. The data consists of 58,240 user submissions to a digital discussion board. Using this digital data, it can not only be analyzed *which* topics users discuss but also *how* they negotiate them. With “topic modeling”, an innovative approach from the computational social sciences (CSS), is combined with qualitative content analysis. The article shows that expert knowledge is picked up by users to justify and reflect on their childrearing practices. By and large, parents refer to expert knowledge in a positive manner, however, some authors are viewed rather critically.

Keywords: parenting online forum, parenting, topic models, digital media, family-related ‘leitbilder’

1. EINLEITUNG UND FRAGESTELLUNG

Eltern sind vielfältigen Ansprüchen und Erwartungen ausgesetzt (Ostner, Betz et al. 2017). Dabei oszilliert die Rolle, die ihnen zugewiesen wird, zwischen der Anrufung als Heilsbringer für diverse gesellschaftliche Probleme und drastischen Warnungen vor steigender erzieherischer Inkompetenz (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013).

Verschiedene Akteure formulieren Erwartungen an eine gelingende Elternschaft, wobei das Ausmaß an „fürsorglicher Belagerung“ (Frevert 1985, Beck-Gernsheim 1997: 109) als wahrer „turn to parenting“ (Daly 2017: 42) beschrieben wird. Politik, Wissenschaft und Experten, die ihr Wissen über Erziehungsratgeber verbreiten, lassen eine zunehmende Bereitschaft erkennen in die Privatsphäre der Familie einzugreifen, indem sie zum Teil explizite Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“ entwerfen (Betz 2012, Daly 2017). Die Eltern-Kind-Beziehung erscheint dabei als Werkzeug, welches genutzt werden kann, um vielfältige gesellschaftliche Problemlagen zu lösen (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013, Gillies 2012).

Dass Eltern durch diese Entwicklung verunsichert und auf der Suche nach Informationen sind, zeigen verschiedene Studien (Merkle und Wippermann 2008, Ruckdeschel 2015). Doch wohin wenden sich Eltern, wenn sie Rat suchen? Welches Wissen finden sie in den verschiedenen Formaten und werden die skizzierten Ansprüche dort thematisiert?

Zur Beantwortung dieser Fragen hat sich die wissenschaftliche Forschung bisher vor allem auf populäre Erziehungsratgeber bezogen. Forscher gehen davon aus, dass diese Ratgeber „a window on cultural norms for childrearing“ (Hoffman 2009: 16) eröffnen. Aber auch politische Dokument sowie standardisierte Befragungen werden verwendet, um Aufschluss über gesellschaftliche Leitbilder „guter Kindheiten“ (Betz 2012) und „normaler Familien“ (Schneider, Diabaté et al. 2015) zu erhalten. Die Annahme hinter diesem Vorgehen ist, dass

sich Leitbilder auch in den elterlichen Selbstbeschreibungen und Praktiken ausdrücken, wobei aber zumeist entweder nur Leitbilder oder elterliche Narrative erfasst werden.

Ein weiteres Medium, welches verstärkt von Eltern genutzt wird, ist das Internet mit seinen Blogs, Foren und sonstigen Informationsangeboten. Die Analyse dieses Mediums hat den Vorteil, dass hier nicht nur aktuelle Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“ identifiziert werden können, sondern zugleich, wie Eltern sich mit diesen auseinandersetzen. Im Fall von Elternforen kommen also beide Seiten in den Blick. Einerseits kann festgestellt werden, *welche* Themen für Nutzer relevant sind und, andererseits, kann zugleich analysiert werden, *wie* diese Themen diskutiert werden.

Diesen beiden Aspekten widmet sich die vorliegende Untersuchung im Folgenden. Zunächst verwende ich ein exploratives Verfahren der quantitativen Textanalyse (sogenannte „topic models“), um festzustellen, welche Themen in digitalen Elternforen diskutiert werden. Die Ergebnisse verwende ich darauffolgend, um zu prüfen, ob Elemente des aktuellen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ innerhalb des Forums aufgegriffen werden. Zuletzt greife ich auf das besondere Analysepotential von Onlineforen zurück, um die Auseinandersetzung um relevante Aspekte des Leitbildes mit Hilfe der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse exemplarisch nachzuzeichnen.

Obschon Mediatisierung bereits als Meta-Prozess der Moderne beschrieben wird (Krotz 2014), welcher längst auch Familien berührt (Clark 2013, Röser, Müller et al. 2017), sind sowohl internetbasierte Daten als auch medial-vermitteltes Handeln von Familien, und die Entwicklung geeigneter Forschungsmethoden noch vernachlässigte Phänomene in der Familiensoziologie. So ist etwa „eine Methodik zur Auswertung von Internet-Foren (...) noch nicht entwickelt“ (Dienel 2003: 133), obwohl sich inzwischen erste methodische Reflexionen finden lassen (Ullrich und Schiek 2014).

Der Aufsatz möchte hier einen Beitrag leisten, indem neuere Verfahren der computational social sciences (CSS) darunter webscraping sowie topic models auf digitale Elternforen angewandt werden. Die Chancen und Risiken internetbasierter Daten und Methoden wurden darüber hinaus bisher häufig nicht eingehend reflektiert (Farrell und Petersen 2010), sodass der Artikel zur Integration neuerer Verfahren in die Familiensoziologie beiträgt.

2. FORSCHUNGSSTAND

Die Analyse von Familienleitbildern kann in unterschiedlichen Komplexitätsgraden erfolgen. Zwischen einem „Leitbild von der Familie im umfassenderen Wortsinne“ (Diabaté und Lück 2014: 57) bis hin zu Analyse einzelner Teilbereiche, wie etwa dem Stillen, sind unterschiedliche Dimensionierungen möglich.

Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint es sinnvoll sich vorab über die relevanten Elemente zu verständigen. Auch um im späteren Verlauf Erwartungen über das Wissen, welches sich in digitalen Elternforen findet, formulieren zu können, werde ich im Folgenden Facetten des aktuellen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ herausarbeiten. Unter einem Leitbild verstehe ich dabei „ein Bündel aus kollektiv geteilten bildhaften Vorstellungen des ‚Normalen‘, das heißt von etwas Erstrebenswerten, sozial Erwünschten und/oder mutmaßlich weit Verbreitetem, also Selbstverständlichem“ (Diabaté und Lück 2014: 56).

Im Gegensatz zu Analysen, die diesen Zusammenhang lediglich postulieren, soll diese Vermutung in der vorliegenden Arbeit allerdings empirisch analysiert werden. Der Vorteil des Leitbildbegriffs für die Untersuchung liegt hierbei darin, dass dieser Akteure nicht als „cultural dopes“ (Garfinkel 1967: 66-75, auch Hays 1996: 75) versteht, die an sie gerichtete Erwartungen lediglich ausführen. Vielmehr setzen sich Akteure durchaus konflikthaft mit diesen auseinander. So ist es etwa vorstellbar, dass aktuelle Anforderungen an die Eltern-Kind-Beziehung „die Menschen abschreckt und überfordert“ (Diabaté und Lück 2014: 61). Nicht

zuletzt zeichnet sich der Leitbildbegriff durch einen „Doppelcharakter als Mikro- und Makrophänomen“ (Diabaté und Lück 2014: 64) aus, welcher sich, so möchte ich zeigen, in besonderer Weise durch die Analyse von Onlineforen umsetzen lässt.

Der Beitrag fokussiert insbesondere auf das aktuelle Leitbild „guter Erziehung“, welches unter dem Begriff des „turn to parenting“ (Daly 2017: 42) diskutiert wird. Diese Perspektive ist zum „predominant way in which child-raising is viewed and talked about“ (ibid.) avanciert und wird zusehends auch für den deutschen Fall relevant (Betz, Honig et al. 2017, Ostner und Stolberg 2015). Die Merkmale des „turn to parenting“ sind nach Daly (2017), erstens, ein Fokus auf spezifische, vermeintlich entwicklungsfördernde Erziehungspraktiken als Ausweis gelingender Elternschaft, zweitens, eine Verwissenschaftlichung der Eltern-Kind-Beziehung (z.B. über Erziehungsstiltypologien) und, drittens, eine verstärkte Neigung der Politik bestimmte Erziehungsvorstellungen zu propagieren.

Im Folgenden werde ich die wichtigsten Elemente dieses Leitbildes umreißen und füllen, wobei bisher nur „eine rudimentäre Leitbild-Forschung“ (Diabaté und Lück 2014: 55) besteht, sodass die Kennzeichnung zum Teil skizzenhaft erfolgen muss. Die Darstellung gliedert sich dabei nach einzelnen Feldern und wirkmächtigen Akteuren, die Erwartungen an Eltern formulieren. Die Forschung stimmt darin überein, dass Wissenschaft, Politik, sonstigen „Experten“ und dem Markt an Erziehungsratgebern sowie –zeitschriften eine gewichtige Rolle zugeschrieben werden kann (Beck-Gernsheim 1997, Daly 2017, Lee, Bristow et al. 2014). Da es sich bei den Facetten des Leitbildes allerdings noch nicht um ein „overall coherent package“ (Daly 2017: 52) handelt und verschiedene Akteure beteiligt sind, ist durchaus auch mit inkohärenten oder widersprüchlichen Erwartungen zu rechnen (Diabaté und Lück 2014: 58).

Im Literaturüberblick beziehe ich bewusst auch Forschung aus dem angelsächsischen Raum ein, da sich Debatten in Deutschland häufig von dortigen Phänomenen beeinflusst zeigen (Gebhardt 2009).

2.1. Erziehungsratgeber und Expertenwissen: Kognitive Förderung und Krisendiskurs

Da ein Großteil der Untersuchungen sich auf Erziehungsratgeber- und -zeitschriften bezieht, beginne ich mit der Darstellung dieses Feldes. Wie eingangs angesprochen, vermuten Forscher durch die Analyse von Erziehungsratgebern „an approximation of the dominant cultural model of raising children“ (Hays 1996: 52) zu finden.

Zunächst fällt die wachsende Anzahl an Ratgeberliteratur auf. Obwohl Aussagen über die genaue Publikationszahl von Erziehungsratgebern schwierig zu treffen sind (Höffer-Mehlmer 2007), zeigt ein Blick in den Katalog der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek eine schier unermessliche und über den Zeitverlauf zunehmende Anzahl an Publikationen.

Ein Ergebnis, welches verschiedene Autoren teilen, ist zudem das steigende Angebot an Literatur zur kognitiven Förderung und Entwicklung von Kindern (Quirke 2006, Wrigley 1989). So identifiziert Quirke (2006) eine wachsende Anzahl an Publikationen, die sich explizit an Eltern wenden, eine Diversifizierung des angesprochenen Publikums - inzwischen gibt es Ratgeber für diverse Zielgruppen - und ein steigendes Interesse am Thema „kognitive Entwicklung“ (395-402).

Erziehungsratgeber, die sich speziell an den deutschen Markt wenden, sind häufig von Krisendiskursen durchzogen (BMFSFJ 2006: 102, Gebhardt 2009, Schmid 2011). Dies wird nicht zuletzt mit dem schlechten Abschneiden der deutschen Schüler im ersten PISA-Test in Verbindung gebracht, welcher als „PISA-Schock“ auch die mediale und politische Debatte maßgeblich beeinflusst hat (Klinkhammer 2014: 253f.).

2.2. Der wissenschaftliche Diskurs: Von der Bedeutung der ersten Jahre

Wissenschaftler spielen ebenfalls eine bedeutende Rolle in der Legitimation und Verbreitung von Leitbildern, indem etwa Studienergebnisse in Erwartungen an elterliche Erziehungspraktiken umgewandelt werden (Kessen 1979).

Gegenwärtig bemerken verschiedene Autoren, dass einige Wissenschaften (Ökonomie, Entwicklungs- und Neuropsychologie) ihre Bedeutung in der politischen und medialen Debatten steigern konnten (Klinkhammer 2014, Ostner 2008), wobei sich deren Einfluss zwischen agenda setting und „*ex post* Unterstützung“ (Ostner 2007: 385, Herv. i.O.) von politischen Entscheidungen bewegt.

In einer Studie, die den entwicklungspsychologischen Diskurs untersucht, stellen Ramaekers und Suissa (2012) fest, dass psychologische Konzepte bereits Eingang in elterliche Selbstbeschreibungen gefunden haben. Hierbei werden insbesondere Phasenmodelle der kindlichen Entwicklung aufgegriffen, welche durch Eltern überwacht werden können (ibid.: 5-9). Aber auch Erziehungsstiltypologien werden vielfach diskutiert und durch Erziehungsratgeber verbreitet (ibid.: 28, Daly 2017: 43f.). Zudem werden Eltern dazu angehalten sich Rat durch Experten einzuholen, um bestmögliche Entscheidungen zu treffen (Ramaekers und Suissa 2012: 23-28). Dies ist eine Erwartung, die sich ebenfalls im politischen Diskurs widerspiegelt (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013). Zuletzt betonen Ramaekers und Suissa (2012), dass die Eltern-Kind-Beziehung verstärkt als zielorientiertes Verfahren behandelt wird:

„Parents, to put it simply, are expected to relate to their children as teachers relate to children - that is, with one or more specific educational targets in mind - which stands in contrast to their ‘ordinary’ daily interactions with their children“ (ibid.: 27).

Auch Neurowissenschaftler melden sich in der Debatte um “gute Erziehung“ zusehends zu Wort (Macvarish 2016, Wastell und White 2012). Diese betonen insbesondere die Bedeutung der ersten Lebensjahre, welche mit Bezug auf die besondere Plastizität des kindlichen Gehirns in der frühen Kindheit begründet wird (kritisch hierzu: Wastell und White 2012).

2.3. Der politische Diskurs: Verstärkte Bereitschaft zur Intervention

Die deutsche Familien- und Bildungspolitik hat in den letzten Jahren einige drastische Veränderungen erfahren (Blum 2017), wobei viele Maßnahmen im Nachgang des sogenannten „PISA-Schocks“ implementiert wurden (Klinkhammer 2014). Erste Anzeichen für eine veränderte Debatte zeigten sich aber bereits mit der Übernahme der Regierungsverantwortung durch Gerhard Schröder im Jahr 1998 und dem Schwenk hin zum sozialinvestiven Wohlfahrtsstaat. In diesem gehören „family policies and education (...) to the most important areas of investment“ (Brettschneider 2008: 26). Die Analyse von Parlamentsdebatten zeigt hier, dass die (frühe) Kindheit nicht mehr als von expliziten Bildungszielen abgegrenzte Phase betrachtet wird (Klinkhammer 2014).

Aktuelle Studien diskutieren zudem das sich abzeichnende Feld der „parenting support policies“ (Ostner, Betz et al. 2017). Hierunter werden Politiken verstanden, die darauf abzielen, Eltern in ihrer Erziehungskompetenz zu stärken (Daly 2013). Die Politik betont dabei die Bedeutung der frühen Kindheit für den späteren Lebensverlauf (Klinkhammer 2014). Ebenfalls findet sich hier die Vorstellung, dass Erziehungshandeln eine Kompetenz ist, die erlernt werden muss (Daly 2017, Ostner und Stolberg 2015).

Ähnliche Argumentationsfiguren identifizieren Betz, de Moll et al. (2013) in ihrer Analyse von politischen Dokumenten. So zeichnet sich „gute Elternschaft“ dadurch aus, dass Eltern „Experten“ konsultieren und ihren Kindern entwicklungsförderliche Umwelten schaffen (Betz und De Moll 2013, Betz, de Moll et al. 2013). Zugleich wird die kindliche Entwicklung als fragil und gefährdet dargestellt (Betz und De Moll 2013). Analoge Entwicklungen werden auch für Großbritannien (Gillies 2005, 2012) und weitere Länder (Hartas 2014) konstatiert.

2.4. Zusammenführung

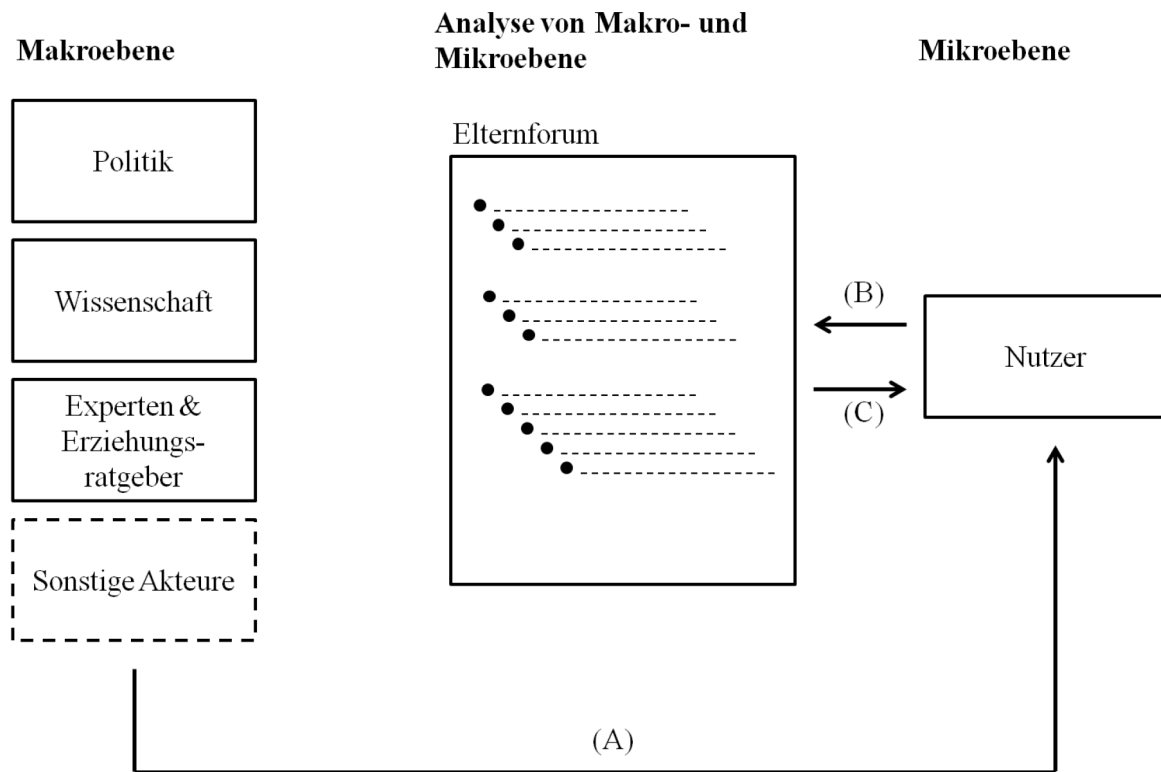
Der skizzierte Forschungsstand erlaubt es mir, mehrere Facetten des aktuellen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ zu identifizieren denen sich Eltern gegenübersehen. Erstens erleben wir eine durchgängige Akzentuierung der (frühen) Kindheit als kritische Phase sowohl für die Lösung gesellschaftlicher Probleme als auch für das Kind selbst. Diese Perspektive wird dabei entweder sozialinvestiv oder mit Bezug auf die Bedeutung der ersten Jahre für die kognitive Entwicklung begründet. Zweitens wird verstärkt die Rolle der elterlichen Erziehungspraktiken für die kognitive Entwicklung der Kinder hervorgehoben. Drittens werden Eltern angehalten die Entwicklung ihrer Kinder zu überwachen und sich Expertenwissen zu bedienen, um informierte Entscheidungen zu treffen.

3. INTERNETFOREN ALS FORSCHUNGSGEGENSTAND

Das bisher betrachtete Material gibt einen Eindruck über Bestandteile des aktuellen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ und „normaler Elternschaft“, wobei Internetforen als ein expandierendes Feld, in dem sich Eltern Rat holen, bisher noch stiefmütterlich behandelt werden (Dienel 2003, Plantin und Daneback 2009). Quantitative Studien zeigen jedoch, dass das Internet insgesamt stark frequentiert wird, um Information zu Erziehungsfragen zu erhalten (Mühling und Smolka 2007: 36). Auch wenn Elternforen dabei noch eine relativ geringe Bedeutung besitzen (ibid.: 43), weisen steigende Nutzerzahlen auf eine wachsende Verbreitung hin (Plantin und Daneback 2009, S. Schneider 2014).

Zudem bieten Elternforen die Möglichkeit zu erfahren, wie die Adressaten Facetten des gegenwärtigen Leitbildes wahrnehmen und diskutieren. So vergleicht Berger (2010) digitale Elternforen mit Sandkastengesprächen zwischen Eltern und betont, dass „Internetforen (...) als durchaus reale Räume des Aushandelns von Erziehungsnormen genutzt werden“ (107).

Grafik 1. Schematische Darstellung der postulierten Zusammenhänge



Anmerkung: (A) Einfluss der makrostrukturellen Leitbilder auf die Nutzer, (B) Forenbeiträge der Nutzer, (C) Einfluss des Forums auf Nutzer

Grafik 1 illustriert die postulierten Zusammenhänge zwischen Leitbildern „guter Erziehung“, wie sie durch Politik, Wissenschaft und Experten formuliert werden, und dem Verhalten von Nutzern des digitalen Elternforums. Auch wird dargestellt, inwiefern das digitale Elternforum durch einen „Doppelcharakter als Mikro- und Makrophänomen“ (Diabaté und Lück 2014: 64) charakterisiert ist.

Es wird erwartet, dass sich die Diskurse und Politiken auf die Nutzer auswirken (Pfeil A) und somit Eingang in die Diskussionen innerhalb des digitalen Elternforums finden (Pfeil B), wobei die Summe an Beiträgen wiederum diskursive Effekte auf Nutzer und stille Mitleser haben kann (Pfeil C). Einzelne Nutzerkommentare können dementsprechend als individuelle Beiträge zu einem Diskurs um Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“ auf der Mikroebene interpretiert werden, während die Aggregation einer Vielzahl von Kommentaren als Bestandteil des Diskurses auf der Makroebene verstanden werden kann.

Die Möglichkeit diese Prozesse zu beobachten besteht nicht, wenn das Datenmaterial politische Dokumente oder Erziehungsratgeber sind (Hays 1996: 52, Quirke 2006: 392), obwohl auch hier verschiedene Formen der Aneignung vermutet werden.

So wird argumentiert, dass Eltern, die aus der Mittelschicht stammen, eher Erziehungsratgeber heranziehen, um sich zu informieren, als Personen aus der Arbeiterklasse (Putnam 2016: 117f.). Auch deuten qualitative Studien darauf hin, dass Eltern Informationen strategisch einsetzen, um ihre Erziehungspraktiken vor signifikanten Anderen zu rechtfertigen (King und Fogle 2006) oder ihrem Kind Vorteile im Bildungssystem zu sichern (Lareau und McCrory Calarco 2012: 72). Es konnte auch gezeigt werden, dass Eltern Rat suchen, der ihre Vorannahmen stützt und sie somit einem Bias unterliegen (Hays 1996: 74-76). Auch wird betont, dass Eltern bestimmten Leitbildern ambivalent gegenüberstehen oder sogar Widerstand leisten (Perrier 2012). Ein Beispiel sind Mittelschichteltern, die sich bewusst für staatliche Schulen entscheiden, die eine diverse Schülerschaft anziehen, statt eine prestigeträchtige Privatschule zu wählen (Crozier, Reay et al. 2008). Derartige Aussagen können nur auf Grundlage einer direkten Befragung der Eltern, gleich ob qualitativ oder quantitativ, durch die Forschenden getroffen werden.

Internetforen stellen einen besonderen Fall dar, da sie einerseits als öffentlich verfügbares Medium Wissen enthalten, welches Eltern beeinflussen kann (Pfeil C in Grafik 1), und diesen andererseits die Möglichkeit gibt, sich zu Themen direkt zu äußern (Pfeil B in Grafik 1) (Ullrich und Schiek, 2014). Im Gegensatz zu Interviews und standardisierten Befragungen unterliegen sie als nichtreaktive Daten zudem nicht der Gefahr, dass Messinstrument oder Interviewereffekte die Ergebnisse beeinflussen, was jedoch eine gezielte Inszenierung der eigenen Erziehungsvorstellungen nicht ausschließt (Salganik 2018: 24).

Familiale Praktiken der Kindererziehung stellen zudem ein sensibles Feld dar, welches einem hohen Maß an sozialer Erwünschtheit unterliegt und damit für die sozialwissenschaftliche Analyse die Gefahr einer Verzerrung in sich trägt. Auch hier scheinen Onlineforen weniger

stark betroffen zu sein (Dienel 2003: 130). Selbst wenn sich vereinzelt sogenanntes „Flaming“ zeigen kann (Misoch 2006: 74-75), sind Onlineforen durch ein „hohes Maß an Offenheit“ (Ullrich und Schiek 2014: 468) gekennzeichnet, welches zuweilen sogar zur „*Enthemmung*“ (Misoch 2006: 75, Herv. i.O.) der Kommunikation führen kann. So werden, wie sich zeigt, auch vermeintlich tabuisierte Themen wie „Gewalt in der Erziehung“ diskutiert.

Einige gewichtige Nachteile hingegen sind fehlende Repräsentativität und Generalisierbarkeit der Ergebnisse. Elternforen stellen keine Zufallsstichprobe dar, sodass Verfahren der Inferenzstatistik nicht angewandt werden können. Zudem lässt sich über die Nutzer nur dasjenige erheben, was diese in ihrem Profil öffentlich angeben oder in ihren Beiträgen offenbaren. In vielen Fällen ist ersteres nicht mehr als ein Pseudonym (Dienel 2003: 130). Auch wird diskutiert, dass einige Populationen von einem „digital divide“ betroffen sind und somit nicht durch internetbasierte Technologien erreicht werden (Hesse-Biber und Griffin 2013: 55).

Zusammenfassend stellen Internetforen ein noch nicht hinreichend beachtetes Medium für die (familien-)soziologische Forschung dar¹⁴, welches es jedoch ermöglicht innovative Fragestellungen zu erforschen (Ullrich und Schiek 2014). Auch wenn einige Nachteile kritisch reflektiert werden müssen, ist es nicht zuletzt auch auf Grund sinkender Ausschöpfungsquoten in quantitativen Surveys (Farrell und Petersen 2010: 116f.) sinnvoll die Möglichkeiten digitaler Daten und geeigneter Methoden eingehend zu prüfen, damit die Sozialwissenschaften nicht den Anschluss verlieren (Farrell und Petersen 2010; Savage und Burrows 2007).

Die Frage ist hierbei nicht, ob internetbasierte Daten und Methoden an Relevanz gewinnen, sondern „whether it happens with or without social scientists“ (Heiberger und Riebling 2016: 1).

¹⁴ Eine Ausnahme stellt Dienel (2003) dar, welche ein deutsches und französisches Elternforum analysiert, wobei ihre Stichprobe nur Threads innerhalb eines Gesamtzeitraumes von einem Monat berücksichtigt. Sie findet hierbei, dass „Gesundheit“, „Schlafen, Schreien, Nachtruhe“ und „Entwicklung des Babys“ die relativ häufigsten Themenkomplexe sind.

4. FRAGESTELLUNG, DATENSATZ UND METHODISCHES VORGEHEN

In diesem Kapitel werden die forschungsleitenden Fragen vorgestellt und diskutiert. Zudem wird der verwendete Datensatz eingeführt und das methodische Vorgehen besprochen.

4.1. Fragestellung

Ich nutze Beiträge aus einem digitalen Elternforum, in welchem die Nutzer sich über Themen der Kindererziehung austauschen können, um folgende forschungsleitende Fragen zu untersuchen:

- (1) Entsprechen die diskutierten Themen im digitalen Elternforum denjenigen, die als prägend für das gegenwärtige Leitbild „guter Erziehung“ ausgemacht werden?

Hierbei gehe ich davon aus, dass sich insbesondere Themen finden lassen, die auch unter Heranziehung anderen Materials identifiziert wurden, dass die Leitbilder also auch in Forumsdiskussionen wirksam werden. Hierzu zählen insbesondere die im vorherigen Kapitel herausgearbeiteten Facetten, welche (1) durch eine Akzentuierung der frühen Kindheit als kritische Entwicklungsphase, (2) einem Fokus auf den (vermuteten) Zusammenhang zwischen Erziehungspraktiken und kognitiver Entwicklung sowie (3) der Notwendigkeit von Expertenwissen charakterisiert sind. Ich folge also der Annahme, dass die Elemente des Leitbildes auf elterliche Selbstbeschreibungen und Praktiken wirken.

Im Gegensatz zu Analysen, die dies lediglich postulieren, bieten Elternforen allerdings das Potential diesen Zusammenhang empirisch zu überprüfen. Hierfür verwende ich ein exploratives Verfahren der quantitativen Textanalyse, welches mir zudem ermöglicht offen für weitere Themen zu sein und als automatisiertes Verfahren der Kodierung eine gewisse Widerständigkeit gegenüber meinen vorgefassten Erwartungen aufweist (Mohr und Bogdanov 2013: 560).

(2) Wie positionieren sich die Nutzer gegenüber Elementen des gegenwärtigen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“?

Autoren, welche Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“ analysieren, sind oftmals nicht in der Lage die Wirkungsweise von Leitbildern auf der Mikroebene einzufangen. Sie formulieren zwar die Annahme, dass „claims that are made *about* and *on* parents can eventually become claims that are made *by* parents themselves“ (Ramaekers und Suissa 2012: vii, Herv. i.O.), aber betrachten zumeist nur die Makroebene. Auch wenn diese Vermutung durchaus nachvollziehbar ist, wird in der Forschung ebenfalls betont, dass Leitbilder unterschiedlich ausgestaltet werden: “mothers mother differently” (Hays 1996: 75). Es wird also auf Resistenz, Ambivalenz und Diversität hinsichtlich der Aneignung von Leitbildern hingewiesen.

4.2.Datensatz

Als Datenbasis nutze ich einen Teil des Forums, welches von der Zeitschrift „Eltern“ betrieben wird. Mit derzeit beinahe 16 Millionen Beiträgen und über 150.000 registrierten Nutzern (Stand: 03.01.2018) gehört dieses Forum zu den größten Elternforen in Deutschland (Berger 2012: 120-127). Hier können sich Nutzer in unterschiedlichen Unterforen austauschen, die Rubriken wie „Leben mit Kind“ oder „Schwangerschaft und Geburt“ zugeordnet sind. Um den Gegenstand der Analyse einzugrenzen, wurde ein Unterforum zur tiefergehenden Betrachtung ausgewählt, welches sich dem Thema „Erziehung“ widmet und in der Rubrik „Entwicklung und Erziehung“ vorzufinden ist.

Mithilfe von eigens erstellten Webcrawlern wurden daraufhin alle Beiträge der Nutzer heruntergeladen, die in einem Zeitraum vom Dezember 2006 bis Juli 2017 eingereicht wurden, und in einen Datenkorpus überführt. Der Datenkorpus besteht aus 58,240 Beiträgen zu 1.137 Diskussionsbeiträgen („Threads“).

Auf den ersten Blick sind die diskutierten Themen dabei sehr heterogen. So finden sich etwa Threads mit den Titeln „Kinder alleine lassen – welche Regeln?“ (21.06.2017), „Mein Sohn 3 ½ Jahre hört nicht zu“ (09.12.2013) oder aber „Juul heute bei Maischberger (und Bueb auch)“ (09.02.2010). Einige Themen erhalten dabei nur wenige Antworten, während andere sich über mehrere Seiten hinziehen und hunderte Beiträge auf sich vereinen. Dies deutet bereits daraufhin, dass nicht alle Themen eine gleich hohe Aufmerksamkeit unter den Nutzern generieren.

4.3. Methodisches Vorgehen

Das methodische Vorgehen kombiniert zwei Verfahren. Zunächst bediene ich mich mit „topic models“ eines Ansatzes der quantitativen Textanalyse, welcher dem Repertoire der „computational social sciences“ (CSS) entstammt (Heiberger und Riebling 2016). Diese Verfahren erlauben es große und oftmals unstrukturierte Datenmengen zu verarbeiten (ibid.). Mithilfe des topic models identifiziere ich relevante Themen, die in einem zweiten Schritt einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse unterzogen werden. Insgesamt folge ich somit einem Vorgehen, das als „blended reading“ bezeichnet wird und darauf abzielt neuere Verfahren der quantitativen Textanalyse („distant reading“) mit klassischen qualitativen Verfahren der Sozialwissenschaften („close reading“) zu kombinieren (Stulpe und Lemke 2016).

Topic models beruhen auf einem Ansatz, der als latent dirichlet allocation (LDA) (Blei, Ng et al. 2003) bezeichnet wird. LDA hat inzwischen eine starke Verbreitung in den „digital humanities“ (Blei 2012b) erfahren und wird ebenfalls vermehrt in der Soziologie (Roberts, Stewart et al. 2016) sowie den Politikwissenschaften (Lucas, Nielsen et al. 2015) eingesetzt, um etwa zu analysieren, wie Experten kulturellen Gütern Wert zu schreiben (Light und Odden 2017) oder Individuen die politischen Begriffe „rechts“ und „links“ interpretieren (Bauer, Barberá et al. 2017).

Ich werde im Folgenden die Annahmen und das zugrundeliegende Verfahren kurz skizzieren, wobei ich für eine tiefergehende Einführung auf die exzellenten Artikel von Blei (2012a) sowie Mohr und Bogdanov (2013) verweise.

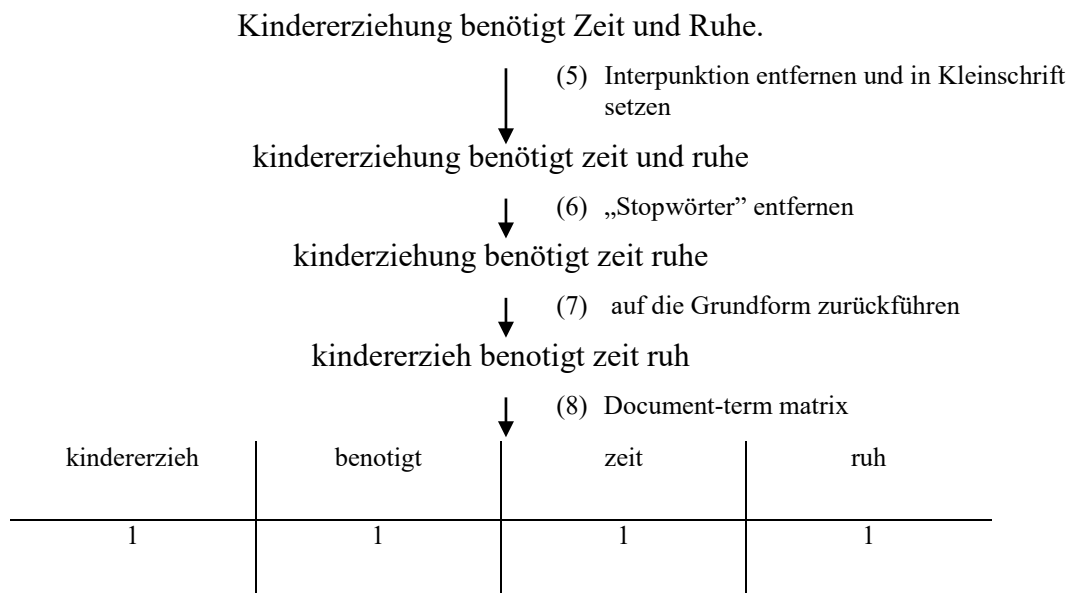
Topic models sind generative Verfahren, die den Entstehungsprozess eines Dokuments statistisch modellieren (Blei 2012a). Sie gehören zu der Familie von probabilistischen Modellen, die verwendet werden, um auf Grundlage von beobachtbaren Daten (hier: Nutzerbeiträge) etwas über die „hidden topic structure“ (ibid.: 80) zu erfahren. Hierbei wird angenommen, dass beobachtete und unbeobachtete Variablen einer gemeinsamen statistischen Verteilung folgen, die über den generativen Prozess miteinander verbunden sind. Das Problem ist nun die Berechnung der latenten Variablen auf Grundlage der beobachteten Daten, wobei Verfahren der Bayesschen Statistik angewandt werden (ibid.).

Weiterhin nimmt das Verfahren an, dass die Themen allen Texten gemein sind, auch wenn sich deren Anteil an einem spezifischen Dokument unterscheiden kann (Blei 2012a: 79). Eine weitere Anwendungsbedingung ist, dass die Anzahl der gesuchten Themen vorab festgelegt wird (Blei und Lafferty 2009: 11-12), wobei verschiedene Verfahren zur Verfügung stehen, um die „optimale“ Anzahl an Themen zu finden (Blei 2012a: 83f.). Das Vorgehen der Modellevaluation wird im Appendix I ausführlich beschrieben. Zuletzt setzt die Anwendung voraus, dass die Daten in einem bestimmten Format vorliegen. Hierfür sind mehrere Schritte der Datenaufbereitung notwendig, welche ich in Grafik 2 anhand eines Beispielsatzes demonstriere (Lucas, Nielsen et al. 2015).

Zunächst (1) wird die Interpunktion entfernt und die Texte in Kleinschrift gesetzt. Daran anschließend (2) werden sogenannte „Stopwörter“ entfernt, welche sehr häufig vorkommen aber für die Identifikation von Themen nicht relevant sind (zum Beispiel: ich, du, er/sie/es,

und).¹⁵ In einem weiteren Schritt (3) werden die Wörter auf ihre Grundform zurückgeführt, was als „stemming“ bezeichnet wird. Das Ergebnis ist ein Datenformat, welches in der Literatur als „bag of words“ bekannt wird. Im letzten Schritt wird eine „document-term matrix“ erstellt, in der jeder Beitrag eine Zeile und jedes Wort eine Spalte einnimmt.

Grafik 2. Exemplarische Datenaufbereitung



Auch wenn dieses Vorgehen radikal erscheint, erlaubt es Einsichten über sehr große Textkorpora zu gewinnen. Lee und Martin (2015) vergleichen diesen Prozess mit der Erstellung einer Landkarte: „Given the incredible loss of meaning and information that accompanies the map, why make it at all? It is precisely because of their impoverishment that maps are useful” (12).

Dies führen Lee und Martin (2015: 12f.) anhand von vier Punkten aus: Karten erlauben es, erstens, unser Datenmaterial zu bearbeiten, da sie es handhabbar machen. Zweitens sind Karten selektiv, das heißt, wir behalten nur die Bestandteile, die wir benötigen, um unser Ziel zu erreichen (hier: die Aufdeckung von Themen). Drittens sind Karten hermeneutisch nicht

¹⁵ Die hier verwendete Liste an „Stopwörtern“ ist eine erweiterte Liste, welche standardmäßig in der verwendeten Software zugänglich ist (Benoit, Watanabe et al 2017). Sie umfasst 718 Wörter und 1400 Nutzernamen.

festgelegt. Auch wenn wir Informationen verlieren, zwingen uns Karten nicht zu einer bestimmten Interpretation. Viertens erleichtern uns Karten diesen ansonsten kognitiv hochkomplexen Prozess. Es ist einfacher sich darüber zu verständigen, ob die Wörter „Disziplin, Gehorsam, Strafe“ zu einem Themenkomplex „Disziplin“ gehören, als dieses Thema manuell in 58,240 Forumsbeiträgen zu identifizieren.

Hier soll nochmal betont werden, dass dieses Vorgehen keineswegs eine „Austreibung des Geistes aus den Sozialwissenschaften“ bedeutet, um einen bekannten Titel von Friedrich A. Kittler (1980) abzuwandeln. Vielmehr erleichtert uns das Verfahren die Tätigkeit der Interpretation, welche Sozialwissenschaftler hervorragend beherrschen (Grimmer und Stewart 2013: 270).

In der Anwendung habe ich mich letztlich für ein „structural topic model“ (STM) (Roberts, Stewart et al. o.J.) entschieden. Dieses beruht ebenfalls auf dem Verfahren der LDA, bietet darüber hinaus aber die Möglichkeit zusätzliche Metadaten aufzunehmen. Ich nutze dieses Potential, um zu prüfen, ob sich die Verteilung der Themen über die Zeit hinweg verändert. Die Verteilung der Themen ist aber relativ konstant, sodass ich in der Ergebnispräsentation den gesamten Zeitraum betrachte.

Unter Berücksichtigung mehrerer Kriterien, die in Appendix I ausführlich beschrieben werden, wurde letztlich ein Modell mit elf Themen ausgewählt. Die Interpretation erfolgte in mehreren Schritten: Zunächst habe ich die einzelnen Themen und verknüpfte Wörter betrachtet, um eine erste Benennung vorzunehmen. Im Anschluss daran habe ich Threads gelesen, die von einzelnen Themen dominiert werden (Grimmer und Stewart 2013: 286f.). Durch dieses Vorgehen konnte ich die Benennung iterativ überarbeiten (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013: 583). Hierbei stellte sich heraus, dass ein Thema nicht genau benannt werden konnte, was für topic models nicht ungewöhnlich ist (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013: 582f., Mimno, Wallach et al. 2011).

In einem letzten Schritt habe ich auf Grundlage des topic models mehrere Threads eines Themas zur qualitativen Analyse ausgewählt. Hierbei wurde das Verfahren der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse verwendet, da dieses sparsame Ansprüche (u.a. Interviewverfahren, Datenaufbereitung) an die vorliegenden Daten stellt (Kuckartz 2016).

5. ERGEBNISSE

Im Folgenden präsentiere ich die Ergebnisse der Analyse, wobei ich zunächst auf das Verfahren der quantitativen Analyse eingehe, um im Anschluss daran die Ergebnisse der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse vorzustellen.

5.1. Ergebnisse der quantitativen Textanalyse

Die Ergebnisse der quantitativen Textanalyse sind in Tabelle 1 dargestellt, wobei die Tabelle die Themenbenennung, die zwanzig am stärksten verknüpften Wörter¹⁶ sowie die relative Häufigkeit der Themen über alle Dokumente hinweg beinhaltet. Zur besseren Lesbarkeit habe ich die resultierenden Wörter wieder vervollständigt und kommentiert (Internetsprache, bestimmte Autoren).¹⁷

Zunächst ist auffallend, dass die zehn verwendeten Topics eine ganze Bandbreite an Erziehungsfragen berühren. So finden sich einige Themen, die eher „klassische“ Alltagsprobleme der Erziehung berühren. Hierzu gehört etwa die Diskussion um „Ernährung“ (T3) oder „Schlafgewohnheiten“ (T11). Beiträge, die mit diesen Themen verknüpft sind, tragen Titel wie „Süßigkeiten – die zweite“ (T3) oder „wann gehen eure kinder abends ins bett?“ (T11).

¹⁶ Hierfür habe ich ein sogenanntes „Frequency and Exclusivity“-Maß (FREX) verwendet, welches die Wörter ausgibt, die in einem Thema häufig vorkommen aber diesem zugleich auch möglichst eigen sind (Roberts, Stewart et al. o.J.).

¹⁷ Da dies auf Grund des „stemmings“ nicht immer eindeutig möglich ist, habe ich mich für die Wörter entschieden, die in stark assoziierten Threads häufig vorkommen.

Tabelle 1. Ergebnis des topic models, Benennung der Themen, verknüpfte Wörter (FREX) und der relative Anteil an allen Dokumenten

Topic Nr.	Topic 1	2	3	4	5
Topic-Bezeichnung	Risiken durch Medien und legale Suchtmittel	Bedürfnisorientierte Erziehung (insb. Jesper Juul)	Ernährung	Ratgeber zur Erziehung	Gewalt in der Erziehung
FREX-Wörter	rauchen	Struktur	isst	Dreikurs (Rudolf) [Psychiater, Ratgeberautor]	klapst
	Waffe	Grundbedürfnis	Gemüse	Tyrann	Klaps
	Zigarette	Partnerschaft	Obst	ermutigen	schlagen
	süchtig	Vorgabe	Nudeln	Imlau (Nora) [Ratgeberautorin]	Gewalt
	Film	Juul (Jesper) [Familientherapeut und Ratgeberautor]	Süßigkeiten	Nora (Imlau) [s.o.]	geklapst
	Helicopter	Gewohnheit	gegessen	warten	gewaltfrei
	Droge	Befindlichkeit	Teller	entmutigt	geschlagen
	Geheimnis	Tagesablauf	Eis	Winterhoff (Michael) [Psychiater und Ratgeberautor]	geschadet
	Medien	Routine	Mittagessen	Ohrenschutz	klapps (sic!)
	iPad	Schlafgewohnheit	Essen	Konflikt	Erziehungsmittel
	PC	Signal	Brot	Vorgehensweise	seelisch
	Bauchgefühl	Gastkind	süß	Trotzanfall	Ohrfeige
	Alkohol	kindlich	Nachtisch	Ursache	Prügel
	Spielzeugwaffe	Herangehensweise	Schokolade	Führung	Finger
	bedingungslos	Schlafmangel	Frühstück	friedlich	Schaden
	Ratgeber	vorgegeben	Fleisch	kindlich	schadet
	App	Orientierung	Joghurt	Säugling	körperlich
	geraucht	Störung	satt	Sichtweise	Ideologie
	Nintendo	Bedürfnis	Eisbecher	Medikament	geklappt (sic!)
	raucht	Müdigkeit	kochen	konstruktiv	demütigen
Relative Häufigkeit	8,2%	2,9%	9,9%	5,3%	3,6%

Topic Nr.	Topic 6	7	8	9	10	11
Topic-Bezeichnung	Schule und Schulsystem	<i>nicht zugeordnet</i>	Geschlechterrollen und Berufstätigkeit	Erziehungsstil und -ziele	Akteure, Orte und Institutionen	Schlafgewohnheiten
FREX-Wörter	Hausaufgabe	KT (Kinderturnen)	Vorname	Strafe	Oma	Bett
	Schulpflicht	Mütze	Spielhaus	Konsequenz	Freundin	schläft
	HA (Hausaufgabe)	einfordern	Mutti	autoritär	Bruder	müde
	Lehrerin	Mobbing	rosa	Grenze	Mädchen	Nacht
	Lehrkraft	loben	Frau	erzogen	Freund	Schlaf
	Unterricht	Einsicht	Schublade	durchsetzen	erzählt	kuscheln
	Leistungsbereitschaft	Dusche	kinderlos	Einsicht	Schwester	geschlafen
	Note	entschuldigen	Vollzeit	unangenehm	Hallo	Abend
	Bildungspflicht	AE (antiautoritäre Erziehung)	Warnweste	antiautoritär	Großeltern	einschlafen
	Leistung	Opfer	schminken	*g* (Internet-sprache für „grins“)	Kindergarten	eingeschlafen
	Lehrer	Schwimmbad	berufstätig	Rücksicht	Tochter	tagsüber
	Abschluss	Manipulation	finanziell	respektlos	Erzieherin	Wochen
	Klasse	mobben	Anrede	Regeln	wurdet	Wohnzimmer
	Abi (Fachhochschulreife)	mitentscheiden	pink	Erziehungsstil	Verhalten	vorlesen
	Schule	Kinderturnen	Töchterlein	negativ	Spielplatz	Schnuller
	Sarrazin (Ursula) [ehem. Lehrerin und Autorin]	frieren	Euro	Beziehung	reagiert	wecken
	Gymnasium	antiautoritär	weiblich	Anspruch	Zuhause	Mittagsschlaf
	impfen	automatisiert	Schubladendenken	höflich	Besuch	Feierabend
	Schulsystem	MOE (Mittelohrentzündung)	männlich	Wort	Opa	aufstehen
	Abitur	Tat	Hausfrau	Handeln	kaputt	wach
Relative Häufigkeit	10,5%	4,5%	8,3%	8,9%	24,8%	13,0%

Aber auch potentielle „Risiken durch Medien und legale Suchtmittel“ (T1), wobei Alkohol und Zigaretten nun auch PCs und Apps an die Seite gestellt sind, werden diskutiert. Ein exemplarischer Beitrag firmiert etwa unter dem Titel „Interessanter Artikel - Computerspiele“. Allerdings verweisen einige Beiträge durchaus auch auf Potentiale von neuen Medien („Wünscht ihr euch eine App, die Kinder zu mehr Bewegung im Alltag motiviert?“ oder „Lernen mit Strategiespielen?“).

Daneben spielen populäre Erziehungsratgeber eine große Rolle. Es werden gleich mehrere bekannte Ratgeberautoren in verschiedenen Themen diskutiert. So wird etwa die „Bedürfnisorientierte Erziehung“ (T2) nach dem dänischen Autor Jesper Juul besprochen. Es finden sich auch die Autoren Rudolf Dreikurs, Nora Imlau und Michael Winterhoff, die im Thema „Ratgeber zur Erziehung“ (T4) verhandelt werden. Dies deutet darauf hin, dass populäres Expertenwissen, welches im aktuellen Leitbild „guter Erziehung“ eine wichtige Rolle einnimmt, Eingang in die Diskussionen findet. Threads tragen hier Titel wie „Juul-Interpretationen“ (T2) oder „Warten lassen“ (T4). In diesen Themen wird bereits deutlich, dass auch psychologische Konzepte verwendet werden, um die eigenen Erziehungspraktiken zu reflektieren. Hierfür stehen Begriffe wie „Bedürfnis“, „Gewohnheit“, „Führung“ und „Konflikt“. Dies wird auch durch das Thema „Erziehungsstil und -ziele“ (T9) unterstrichen, in welchem dezidiert Konzepte aus der psychologischen Forschung zu Erziehungsstilen („autoritär“, „antiautoritär“, „Erziehungsstil“) aufgegriffen werden.

Es konnte ebenfalls ein Thema identifiziert werden, welches Diskussionen um „Geschlechterrollen und Berufstätigkeit“ (T8) beinhaltet. Die Beiträge setzen sich hier mit der „pinkifizierung“ auseinander oder diskutieren das Thema „nochmal Hausfrau vs. arbeitende Mutter“. Es geht also sowohl um Geschlechterrollen der Kinder als auch um die familiäre Arbeitsteilung.

Ein weiteres Thema befasst sich mit „Schule und Schulsystem“ (T6), in welchem Threads wie „Elternabend und Hausübungen und Co“ und „Das Wesen der Schule“ zu finden sind. Verknüpfte Wörter zeigen, dass die Rolle von Bildungsabschlüssen („Abschluss“, „Abi“, „Gymnasium“) aber auch des Lehrpersonals („Lehrkraft“, „Lehrer“, „Lehrerin“) diskutiert werden.

Ebenfalls werden vermeintlich tabuisierte Themen wie „Gewalt in der Erziehung“ (T5) debattiert, was anzeigt, dass digitale Elternforen durch eine „*Enthemmung*“ (Misoch 2006: 75, Herv. i.O.) im Sinne einer großen Offenheit charakterisiert sind (Ullrich und Schiek 2014).

Zuletzt konnte ein Querschnittsthema identifiziert werden, welches bedeutende „Akteure, Orte und Institutionen“ (T10) in der Erziehung zusammenfasst. Hierzu zählen etwa Großeltern („Oma“, „Opa“), Geschwister („Bruder“, „Schwester“) und bedeutende Institutionen („Kindergarten“, „Erzieherin“). Der hohe relative Anteil dieses Themas unterstreicht, dass die hier identifizierten Akteure eine immense Bedeutung im digitalen Elternforum innehaben. Das Nahfeld der Familie ist weiterhin der bedeutendste Bezugspunkt für Erziehungsfragen und -probleme.

Im Hinblick auf die Fragestellung nach Elementen des gegenwärtigen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ zeigt sich, dass Expertenwissen eine wichtige Rolle im digitalen Elternforum spielt. Dieses wird jedoch vor allem in Form von populären Erziehungsratgebern rezipiert, welche als Vermittler auftreten. Hier kann durchaus davon gesprochen werden, dass Erziehungsratgeber „a window on cultural norms for childrearing“ (Hoffman 2009: 16) eröffnen. Auch finden wissenschaftliche Konzepte Eingang in die digitale Diskussion um Erziehung. Insbesondere Erziehungsstiltypologien werden im Forum thematisiert. Der Zusammenhang zwischen Erziehungspraktiken und kognitiver Entwicklung scheint nur latent in der Bedeutung von Bildungsinstitutionen und –abschlüssen auf. Die (frühe) Kindheit als kritische Phase, welche besonderes Augenmerk erfordert, ist kein bedeutendes Thema in der Onlinediskussion.

5.2. Ergebnisse der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse

In einem letzten Schritt verwende ich die Ergebnisse des topic models, um einige Diskussionsbeiträge für die qualitative Inhaltsanalyse auszuwählen. Ich folge damit einem Vorgehen, welches als „blended reading“ (Stulpe und Lemke 2016) bezeichnet wird.

Die Auswahl fiel dabei auf das Thema „Ratgeber zur Erziehung“ (T4), da Expertenwissen, welches durch Ratgeber popularisiert wird, Bestandteil des aktuellen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ ist. Für die qualitative Inhaltsanalyse habe ich fünf Forenbeiträge ausgewählt, die am stärksten mit dem Thema verknüpft sind, wobei die Threads zwischen 473 und 71,615 Wörter lang sind.

Da es mir insbesondere darum geht, wie sich die Nutzer mit der identifizierten Facette des Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ auseinandersetzen, beinhaltet das Kodierschema die „Positionierung gegenüber Experten(wissen)“ und Passagen, die sich mit der „Relevanz von Experten für die eigene Erziehungspraxis“ auseinandersetzen, wobei auch offen kodiert wurde. Zudem habe ich Memos erstellt, die die jeweiligen Threads zusammenfassen. Die ausgewählten Threads finden sich in Tabelle 2, wobei Titel, eine Kurzbeschreibung des Themas, die genannten Experten und die Positionierung der Nutzer bezüglich des Expertenwissens als auch die Länge der Threads aufgenommen wurden.

Tabelle 2 zeigt dabei, dass in den ausgewählten Threads vielfältige „Experten“ herangezogen werden, wobei Rudolf Dreikurs, Jesper Juul und Michael Winterhoff bezüglich der einfachen Nennung dominieren. Weitere „Experten“ sind unter anderem Wolfgang Bergmann, Arno Gruen und Marshall B. Rosenberg. Der Anteil der Nennungen unterscheidet sich allerdings zwischen den einzelnen Threads. Es gibt jedoch keine Diskussion, die gänzlich ohne Rekurs auf Expertenwissen erfolgt.

Tabelle 2. Beschreibung des Samples und Ergebnisse der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse

Titel	Thema	Genannte Experten (Nennung)	Positionierung gegenüber Experten	Wortanzahl
Link	Radiobeitrag des Psychoanalytikers Arno Gruen	Gruen, Arno (11)	Abgrenzung auf Grund von Aussagen zum plötzlichen Kindstod	473
Mal einschleich...	Erfahrungsbericht zu einem Erziehungskurs	Dreikurs, Rudolf (2)	Rein positiver Bezug zu Kurs und Experten	532
Warten lassen	Sollten Kinder bewusst warten gelassen werden? Fallbeispiel: Speisezeiten in einem Kindergarten.	Dreikurs, Rudolf (164) Juul, Jesper (148) Winterhoff, Michael (44)	Größtenteils positiver Bezug zu Expertenwissen	71,615
Was haltet ihr von Rosenberg und GFK?	Kommunikation in der Familie insbesondere „Gewaltfreie Kommunikation“ nach Marshall B. Rosenberg	Rosenberg, Marshall B. (14) Bergmann, Wolfgang (2) Juul, Jesper (2)	Sowohl positive als auch negative Bezüge	3,475
Eltern als Leuchtturm und Sparringspartner	Berücksichtigung kindlicher Bedürfnisse.	Juul, Jesper (245) Winterhoff, Michael (61) Dreikurs, Rudolf (5)	Positiv, jedoch einige Abgrenzungen zu Michael Winterhoff	64,329

Die qualitative Analyse deutet zudem darauf hin, dass positive Bezugnahmen überwiegen. So finden sich viele Aussagen, die den eigenen Lernfortschritt in der Auseinandersetzung mit Ratgebern hervorheben („Ich habe viel in der Auseinandersetzung mit Juul gelernt“; „Ich bin eine große Befürworterin von Rudolf Dreikurs“).

Es zeigt sich aber auch, dass die Nutzer bestimmte Autoren kritisch einordnen. So wird ein Thread („Link“), der mit einem Radiobeitrag des Psychoanalytikers Arno Gruen eröffnet wird, schnell beendet, als eine Nutzerin bemerkt:

„Hallo, mal zur besseren Einschätzung, wer dieser Psychoanalytiker A.Grün ist: In seinem Buch ‚der frühe Abschied‘ macht er Mütter für den plötzlichen Kindstod verantwortlich, durch ‚unbewusste Feindseligkeit‘ gegenüber dem Kind! Ganze 15 Einzelfälle stützen seine These. Und so einer äußert sich zu ‚vielfachem Mangel an Mitgefühl‘! Prost Mahlzeit“.

Eine andere Nutzerin bemerkt bezüglich eines Ratgebers von Michael Winterhoff, dass sie sich an der Sprache stört: „Mein Hauptkritikpunkt ist die Sprache. Sie stösst (sic!) mich ab“. Insgesamt überwiegen jedoch positive Bezüge in den ausgewählten Threads.

In der offenen Kodierung fiel zudem auf, dass die Nutzer die verwendeten Begriffe und Konzepte der „Experten“ in ihren Beiträgen übernehmen. Exemplarisch sind hier Winterhoffs „Tyrrannen“ zu nennen oder aber „(direkt/spiegelverkehrte) Kooperation“ bei Jesper Juul, was ein weiteres Indiz dafür ist, dass Expertensprache in elterliche Selbstbeschreibungen aufgenommen wird.

Es ist auch auffällig, dass Expertenwissen oft als Eingangsstimulus verwendet wird, um Erziehungsfragen zu diskutieren. Die einzelnen Threads entfernen sich aber schnell von diesem Wissen und orientieren sich eher an Beispielen und der eigenen Erziehungspraxis.

Expertenwissen wird dann eher indirekt herangezogen und die Anzahl der direkten Bezüge sinkt.

6. DISKUSSION

In dem vorliegenden Beitrag habe ich untersucht, welche Themen Nutzer eines großen deutschen Elternforums diskutieren und ob diese mit Elementen des aktuellen Leitbildes „guter Erziehung“ korrespondieren. Dies konnte in Teilen bestätigt werden. So spielt Expertenwissen, welches vor allem in Form von Erziehungsratgebern rezipiert wird, eine große Rolle im digitalen Elternforum. Auch psychologische Fachtermini werden verwendet und finden Eingang in die Beschreibung der eigenen Erziehungspraktiken. Kindheit wird hingegen nicht explizit als kritische Entwicklungsphase reflektiert und auch direkte kognitive Förderung ist kein dominierender Bestandteil der Diskussion, obgleich das Bildungssystem und -erwartungen thematisiert werden.

Es konnten darüber hinaus weitere Themen identifiziert werden, welche eher „klassische“ Felder von Erziehung ansprechen. Hier sind etwa die Themen „Schlafgewohnheiten“ und „Ernährung“ zu nennen. Zugleich werden auch neuere Thematiken diskutiert, die mit gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen zusammenhängen. So werden die „Gefahren und Risiken durch Medien und legale Suchtmittel“ besprochen, wozu auch digitale Medien wie Smartphones und Computerspiele gehören. Ein weiteres Thema widmet sich „Geschlechterrollen und Berufstätigkeit“ und greift damit ebenfalls gesellschaftlichen Wandel auf.

Die zweite Frage widmete sich der Auseinandersetzung mit dem gegenwärtigen Leitbild „guter Erziehung“. Hier habe ich anhand eines Themas (Ratgeber zur Erziehung) exemplarisch aufgezeigt, dass sich der gewählte Methodenmix nutzen lässt, um zu untersuchen, wie sich Nutzer über ein Element des aktuellen Leitbildes verständigen. Der Bezug auf das

Expertenwissen erfolgt dabei in weiten Teilen positiv. Die qualitative Analyse der Beiträge deutet aber auch an, dass die Integration einer großen Anzahl an Nutzern eine korrektive Funktion haben kann. Dies wurde deutlich bei einem Beitrag zu Arno Gruen, welcher bezüglich seiner Aussagen zum plötzlichen Kindstod kritisiert wird.

Die qualitative Inhaltsanalyse unterstrich zudem, dass Begriffe aus dem wissenschaftlichen Kontext (z.B. Erziehungsstiltypologien), aber auch aus dem Wortschatz spezifischer „Experten“ von Eltern aufgegriffen werden, um ihre eigene Erziehungspraxis zu beschreiben. „Expertensprache“ findet also Eingang in elterliche Selbstbeschreibungen, jedoch bedürfen die Implikationen einer weiteren Analyse.

So vermuten Ramaekers und Suissa (2012), dass Eltern durch die Verwendung von abstrakten Bausteinen aus dem wissenschaftlichen Diskurs „‘blind‘ to their *own* children“ (31, Herv. i.O.) werden. Qualitative Interviews mit Nutzern, die in diesen Themen besonders engagiert sind, könnten hierüber Aufschluss geben und stellen ein Forschungsdesiderat dar.

Zuletzt plädiert der Beitrag für eine Verknüpfung von quantitativer Textanalyse mit qualitativen Verfahren der Textinterpretation, welche im Sinne eines „blended reading“ (Stulpe und Lemke 2016) integriert wurden. Hierbei haben sich Elternforen als fruchtbares Forschungsmaterial erwiesen, wobei sich einige Herausforderungen für die weitere wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung ergeben: Zunächst bleibt unklar, welche Personengruppen die Elternforen nutzen. Dies lässt sich anhand der Nutzerprofile nicht feststellen. Die Ergebnisse lassen sich dementsprechend nicht generalisieren und sollten eher als Anstoß für weitere Analysen betrachtet werden. Dies schränkt auch die Erklärung von abweichenden Formen der Aneignung ein, da diese sich mit den vorliegenden Daten nicht auf Hintergrundvariablen, wie etwa den sozioökonomischen Status, zurückführen lassen. Generell erscheint eine stärkere Berücksichtigung von vielfältigen Aneignungsprozessen wünschenswert, wobei auf

Vorarbeiten aus der erziehungswissenschaftlichen Diskussion zurückgegriffen werden kann (Deinet und Reutlinger 2014, Kade 1993).

Auch konnte nur angedeutet werden, wie sich digitale Elternforen verwenden lassen, um die Auseinandersetzung um gesellschaftliche Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“ qualitativ nachzuzeichnen. Ein umfangreicheres Forschungsprogramm erscheint notwendig, um den Leitbildcharakter der identifizierten Themen abzusichern.

Zusammenfassend sind Elternforen ein noch recht unerforschtes Terrain für die Familienforschung, welches jedoch den Vorteil besitzt, dass hier sowohl Leitbilder „guter Erziehung“ als auch die Auseinandersetzung mit diesen gemeinsam betrachtet werden können.

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APPENDIX: MODELLEVALUATION

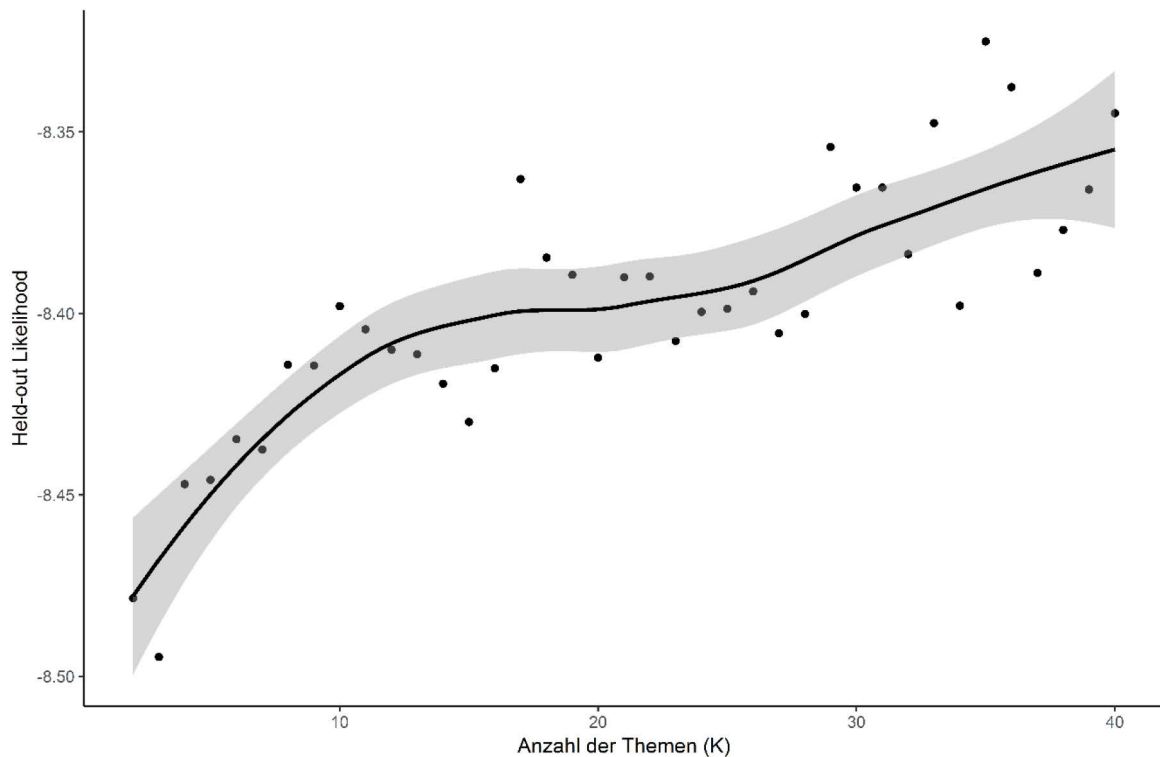
Topic models erfordern es, dass die Anzahl der gesuchten Themen (K) vorab festgelegt wird (Blei und Lafferty 2009: 11f.). Hierbei hat sich bisher kein Goldstandard herausgebildet, der eine definitive Lösung bietet (Chang, Gerrish et al. 2009). Ich folge deshalb dem Vorgehen von Bail (2016) und Roberts, Stewart et al. (o.J.), indem ich drei statistische Kriterien heranziehe. Hierzu gehören Held-out Likelihood, ein Exklusivitätsmaß und ein Maß für die semantische Kohärenz (Mimno, Wallach et al. 2011) der Themen. Alle Maße sind im R-Paket `stm` verfügbar (Roberts, Stewart et al. o.J.).

Die statistischen Kriterien geben einen Hinweis darauf, welche Modelle für eine weitere Betrachtung in Frage kommen. Allerdings geht es bei der Evaluation der Modelle vor allem auch um den „*substantive fit*“ (Grimmer und Stewart 2013: 286, Herv. i.O.). Hierzu führen DiMaggio, Nag et al. (2013) aus:

„Finding the right lens is different than evaluating a statistical model based on a population sample. The point is not to estimate population parameters correctly, but to identify the lens through which one can see the data most clearly“ (582).

Für das erstere Verfahren wird zunächst jeweils ein topic model mit einer gegebenen Anzahl an Themen (K) berechnet, wobei ich Modelle für 2-40 Themen gewählt habe. Wichtig ist dabei, dass eine gewisse Anzahl an Dokumenten dem Modell vorenthalten bleibt (deshalb „held-out“; hier: 10% der Dokumente) und dieses nur auf das verbleibende „training set“ angewandt wird. Das hervorgehende Modell wird anschließend verwendet, um die verbleibenden Dokumente zu prognostizieren (Hox 2017: 5f.). Die Ergebnisse sind in Grafik 3 dargestellt.

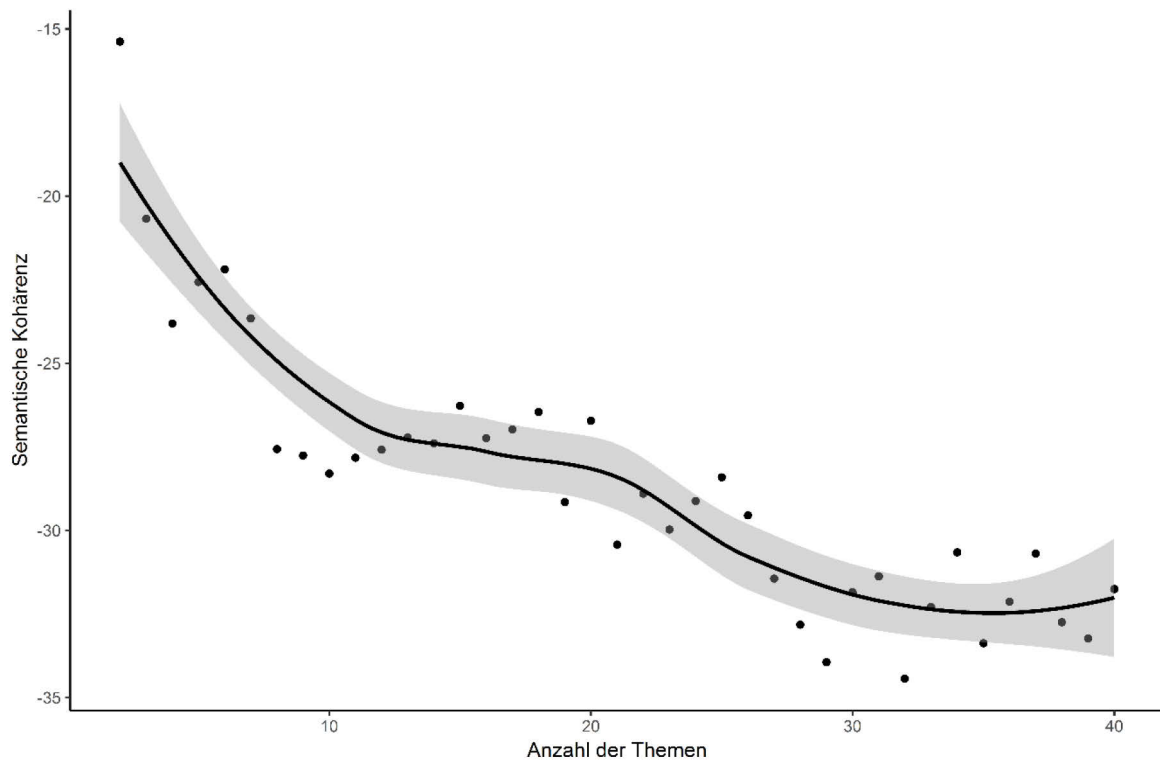
Grafik 3. Held-out Likelihood für topic models mit $K = 2-40$.



Die Grafik zeigt an, dass die Prognosekraft der Modelle mit steigender Anzahl an Themen zunimmt. Ein erstes Plateau wird allerdings bereits bei Modellen mit zehn Themen erreicht.

Als zweites Kriterium betrachte ich die semantische Kohärenz, welche prüft, ob Wörter, die einem Thema angehören, auch häufig gemeinsam in den einzelnen Dokumenten auftauchen. Wichtig ist hierbei, dass semantische Kohärenz und Exklusivitätsmaß gemeinsam betrachtet werden, da semantische Kohärenz auch erreicht wird, wenn alle Themen von wenigen, aber sehr häufigen Wörtern dominiert sind. Um dies zu vermeiden, lässt sich das Exklusivitätsmaß heranziehen, da dieses die Abgrenzung zwischen Themen berücksichtigt (Roberts, Stewart et al. o.J.: 11f.).

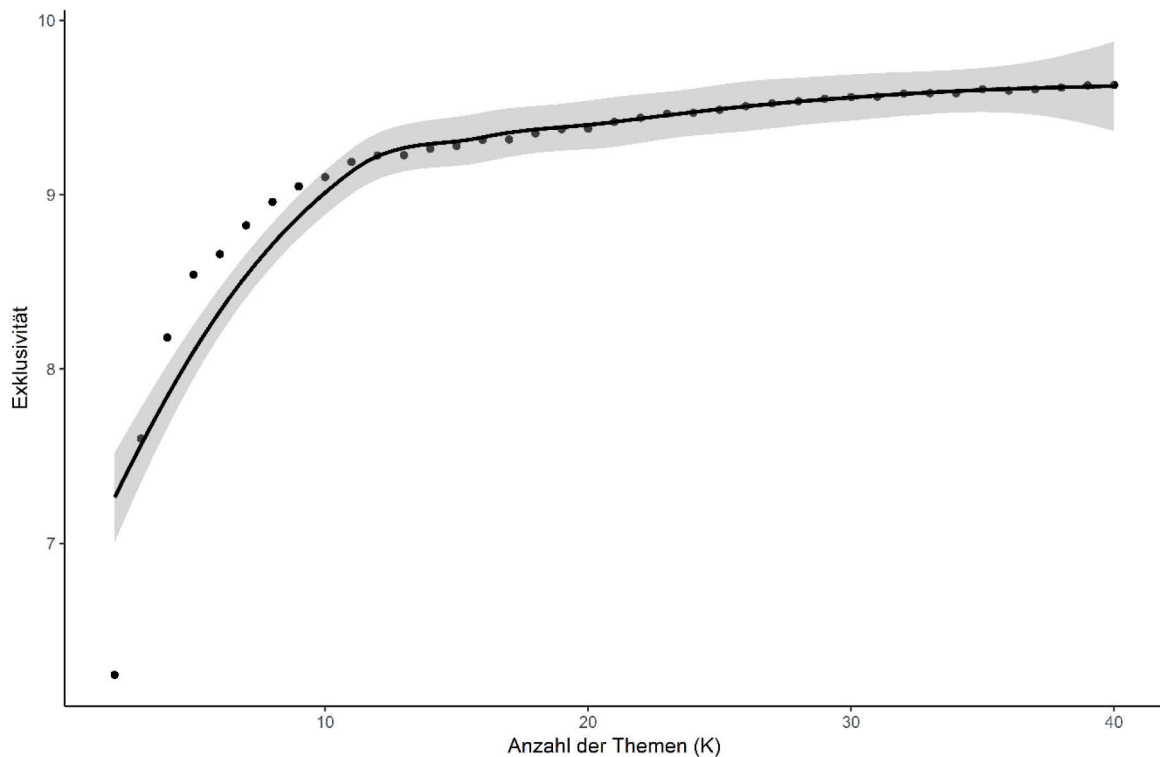
Grafik 4. Semantische Kohärenz für topics models mit $K = 2-40$.



Zunächst lässt sich aber feststellen, dass die semantische Kohärenz mit steigender Anzahl an Themen abnimmt, wobei Modelle mit 8-20 Themen sich kaum unterscheiden.

Zuletzt berechne ich einen Exklusivitätsscore, der angibt, ob Wörter, die mit einem Thema verknüpft sind, zugleich selten in anderen Themen erscheinen. Er zeigt an, ob die identifizierten Themen sich voneinander abgrenzen lassen. Die Ergebnisse finden sich in Grafik 5.

Grafik 5. Exklusivitätsscore für topics models mit $K = 2-40$.



Hier zeigt sich, dass Modelle mit mindestens zehn Themen sich gut voneinander abgrenzen lassen. Eine Erhöhung der Anzahl an Themen führt zu keiner Verbesserung mehr. Es wird zudem die gegenläufige Tendenz zur semantischen Kohärenz deutlich.

Insgesamt zeigt sich, dass „there is no statistical test for the optimal number of topics“ (DiMaggio, Nag et al. 2013: 582). Auf Grundlage der statistischen Kriterien konnten aber Modelle ausgewählt werden, welche in mehreren Bereichen gute Ergebnisse erzielten. Dies sind Modelle mit 8-12 Themen. Eine genauere Betrachtung der verknüpften Wörter zeigte hierbei, dass die meisten Themen robust sind. Die Interpretierbarkeit nimmt bei Modellen mit sehr vielen Themen zudem ab. Das Modell mit elf Themen wurde letztlich ausgewählt, da dieses sowohl bezüglich der statistischen Kriterien als auch der Interpretierbarkeit die besten Ergebnisse erzielte.

PAPER 3: (Un)equal from the Start? A Quantitative Analysis of Preschool Children's Participation in Organised Activities in Germany

Published in European Early Childhood Research Journal **26**(6): 855:872.

DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2018.1533705

(Un)equal from the Start? A quantitative Analysis of Preschool Children's Participation in Organised Activities in Germany

Abstract

In this article, I investigate preschool children's participation in organised activities. Current political and academic debates consider informal education as a prime vehicle for potentially diminishing social class inequalities in educational outcomes before school entry. However, studies point to unequal participation rates between social classes, which means the activities might actually aggravate existing disparities. Various explanations have been offered for this social class gap. Some scholars argue that material resources play a pivotal role, while others say that culture is the decisive factor. This study uses the kindergarten cohort of the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) to test how far these two dimensions contribute to social class differences in preschool children's participation in organised activities. My analysis shows that both dimensions are important determinants of children's participation in organised activities. However, occupational characteristics also have a considerable effect, which suggests shortcomings in the current scholarly discussion.

Keywords: early childhood; parenting; social class; organised activities; early childhood education and care (ECEC)

1. INTRODUCTION

Historians and social scientists have frequently pointed out that childhood is a social construct which is not fixed through time or space (Ariés 1962, Keller, Lamm et al. 2006). Children are an 'ideal projection screen for a society's self-perception, its dreams, and its visions for the

future' (Gebhardt 2009: 13, translated), and as such they are subject to competing demands and standards (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012). However, scholars have identified common components of a hegemonic model of a 'good' childhood in various societal spheres such as politics (Gillies 2012, Betz, de Moll et al. 2013) and science (Putnam 2016: 109-117). The emerging ideal has been termed 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996), 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2011) and 'parenting for cognitive development' (Schaub 2010). Following Beck-Gernsheim (1997), this model has the following main drivers: science, politics, (education) professionals, and childrearing manuals (109f.). However, it has also been picked up by market actors (e.g. toy stores and the preschool enrichment market; see Vincent and Ball 2007, Smyth 2016). Looking at current debates on parenting, one gets the impression that these kinds of parenting practices have reached unexpected heights (Lee, Bristow et al. 2014).

Firstly, policymakers have identified parenting as 'a mechanism for tackling social ills' (Gillies 2012: 13). It is thought that interventions in parenting might mitigate educational disparities from the outset (Hartas 2015), and various countries have proposed government programmes designed with this in mind (Gillies 2008, Daly 2013). This development has led scholars to speak of a 'politicization of parenthood' (Richter and Andresen 2012, Macvarish 2014). Secondly, hopes surrounding the equalizing effect of informal education are fuelled by scholars who support interventions during early childhood (Gillies 2012, Lee 2014, Edwards, Gillies et al. 2016). For instance, Nobel laureate James Heckman (2008) stresses that '[g]aps in the abilities (...) open up very early across socioeconomic groups' (298) and that investments made during early childhood thus provide 'high benefit-cost ratios and rates of return' (see also Esping-Andersen 2008, *ibid.*: 290). Thirdly, popular education guidebooks and parenting magazines promote the idea of encouraging cognitive development from an early age (Wrigley 1989, Quirke 2006, BMFSFJ 2013: 100-104).

In all these spheres, a prominent role is assigned to organised activities (Vincent and Maxwell 2016). These activities could potentially diminish disparities (Vandenbroeck and Lazzari 2014). A case in point are music lessons that have been shown to exert positive effects on school grades and cognitive skills (Mühler and Spieß 2008, Hille and Schupp 2015). However, organised activities could also be ‘building blocks in class care strategies’ (Stefansen and Farstad 2010: 121) and hence constitute ‘a mechanism through which social inequalities are maintained and reproduced’ (Bennett, Lutz et al. 2012: 131).

Given these contradictory perspectives, the scarcity of empirical evidence on the actual use of these activities is quite surprising. Yet despite the lack of evidence, political programmes have already been initiated (Gillies 2008). What is more, there is a danger of scapegoating less affluent and single parents. In this vein, Macvarish (2014) asserts that ‘problems that would once have been conceived of as structural in origin, such as poverty, inequality, poor educational progress, or the ill health associated with social deprivation, have now come to be attributed to parental behavior’ (83f.). This transformation has been described as an ‘individualization of social class’ (Gillies 2005). Against this background, the article proposes to take a step back by asking which factors contribute to the differential uptake of organised activities.

Germany is a prime case for studying parenting in times of changing demands. It has been pointed out that educational trends are often imported into Germany with a time lag (Gebhardt 2009). Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a prominent example. In Germany, ECEC only recently gained attention from policymakers and became an aim of social policy (Betz 2012, Ostner and Stolberg 2015). Conflictingly, however, government documents also stress that the cognitive stimulation of children is primarily the responsibility of parents (Betz, de Moll et al. 2013).

By using the German National Educational Panels Study (NEPS) (Blossfeld, von Maurice et al. 2011), my study contributes to the debate by analysing the empirical distribution of organised activities through ‘a social class lens’ (Hartas 2015: 33). I will begin by reviewing the current state of the field (Section 2) in order to trace the main lines of argument. I will then present the hypotheses and concepts (Section 3), introduce the data (Section 4) and present my results (Section 5). I will conclude by summarizing the findings and integrating them into the scholarly discussion (Section 6).

2. STATE OF THE FIELD

Although the relationship between social class and parenting attracts considerable attention, scholars do not share a common understanding of the underlying mechanism. Following Sherman and Harris (2012), a major dividing line is ‘whether structural conditions or cultural understandings are the more important influences’ (60).

The most prominent adherent of the cultural approach is certainly Anette Lareau (2011). Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the US, Lareau (2011) found that middle-class and working-class parents raise their children according to two distinct logics of childrearing: ‘concerted cultivation’ and ‘accomplishment of natural growth’, respectively. While middle-class parents offer their children a myriad of organised leisure activities, elicit their opinions and put emphasis on a good rapport with teachers, their working-class counterparts use more directives, maintain a looser schedule for organised activities and are less involved in institutional settings (Lareau 2011). This conceptualization shows that organised activities are a core dimension (Vincent and Maxwell 2016).

Quantitative studies conducted in the US confirmed and expanded on Lareau’s findings (Bodovski and Farkas 2008, Bodovski 2010, Cheadle and Amato 2011). In addition, Lareau herself was part of a team that examined her hypothesis by using quantitative time-survey data

(Lareau, Weininger et al. 2011, Weininger, Lareau et al. 2015). Weininger, Lareau et al. (2015) found that household income is positively related to annual expenditure on organised activities, but that maternal education level plays an even bigger role. Regarding their second dependent variable, ‘weekly time spent in organised activities’, the researchers found that income fails to reach significance while education still exerts a positive effect. The authors interpret the positive effect of maternal education as a cultural effect (Weininger, Lareau et al. 2015: 498f.).

Another strand of research considers parenting as an investment of time and money (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013: 2). From this perspective, constraints on resources are thought to impede parental investments. While time investments are mainly required for managing children’s schedules, monetary investments are assumed to be far more important. Regarding the latter, household income emerged as a strong predictor in the US (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013). Using a qualitative sample of eighth-graders and their parents in the US, Bennett, Lutz et al. (2012) found that financial constraints were more significant than culture. This conclusion is also reached by Chin and Phillips (2004), who report that the social class gap in summer break activities stems mainly from differences in financial situations.

However, a major problem with the aforementioned approaches is that they treat social class as a kind of nuisance that persists after its material or cultural aspects have been stripped away. Even if a measure of social class position is used, it is rarely the focus of any theorizing. Nonetheless, resources and culture are far from being the whole story when it comes to social class.¹⁸

And in fact, a third approach is interested in the effect of occupational conditions on parenting (i.e. occupational effects). Following Kohn (1963) and Kohn and Slomczynski (1993), the

¹⁸ In fact, none of the (quantitative) studies reviewed here include a measure of social class that is rooted in occupational conditions. Two notable exceptions exist. Firstly, the study by De Moll and Betz (2014) uses a measure of occupational status. Unfortunately, however, their social class variable is included in a composite measure. Secondly, Weininger, Lareau et al. (2015) control for parents who are employed in either professional jobs or self-employed. These dummy variables are, however, hardly rooted in a theory of social class.

position in the occupational structure is correlated with certain demands of the job – i.e. to obey authority or exercise self-direction. These demands are, moreover, reflected in differing value commitments which then steer childrearing practices (see also Chan and Koo 2011). For instance, Weininger and Lareau (2009) have shown that middle-class parents perceive organised activities as a way of encouraging independence in their children, and as a way of subtly controlling the course of their children's curiosity and (self-)direction.

With regard to Germany, research on children's organised activity participation is still scarce (De Moll and Betz 2014: 238). However, using the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), Hille, Arnold et al. (2013) report increasing rates of adolescent involvement in education-related leisure activities over time. This indicates that organised activities are becoming more important in Germany. In addition, by analysing Families in Germany (FID) data, Schroeder, Spieß et al. (2015) found that household income and parental education are positively related to monetary expenditure on children's formal and informal education. Interestingly, expenditure is highest for younger children, who are the target group of this study (Schroeder, Spieß et al. 2015).

Mühler and Spieß (2008) also analysed GSOEP data and found that maternal education and household income are positively related to preschool children's participation in organised activities. They found negative effects for children whose mothers are in full-time employment or who were born in foreign countries. The number of siblings also has a negative effect. The number of books in the household, a common measure for cultural capital, does not have a statistically significant effect (Mühler and Spieß 2008). In a similar study, Schober and Spiess (2013) indicate that differences persist between the former West and East Germany. A more recent study by De Moll and Betz (2014) used data from the Growing up in Germany survey (AID:A) to examine ECEC arrangements of parents with preschool children. Their analysis

showed that working-class parents and immigrants are less likely to enrol their children in organised activities (De Moll and Betz 2014).

While De Moll and Betz (2014) focus on general enrolment in activities over and above kindergarten attendance, and Mühler and Spieß (2008) focus on the general tendency to participate in at least one activity, the present study adds nuance by considering different organised activities and hence supplements both of these studies. More importantly, the field is divided into scholars who focus on the structural constraints that less affluent parents face, and scholars who focus on the role of culture. To the detriment of the field, however, scholars on both sides rarely apply methods that can separate the effect of social class (if they consider it at all) into its cultural and material parts. This study attempts to enrich the debate by investigating whether money or culture matters (more).

3. CONCEPTUALIZATION AND HYPOTHESES

This paper intends to shed light on how social class influences the organised activities promoted by the current ideal of parenting as cognitive stimulation. I have identified three common perspectives on this social class effect. First, scholars emphasising the role of material constraints argue that parents enrolling their children in organised activities incur considerable costs. As Vincent and Maxwell (2016) put it laconically, ‘these classes cost and some cost a lot’ (274). Accordingly, I hypothesize that there will be lower participation rates among children with less affluent parents (**H1**).

While the rationale for considering material resources is quite straightforward, the influence of culture remains open to interpretation (Weininger, Lareau et al. 2015: 498f.). How do different logics of childrearing come about? In a dense passage, Lareau (2011) argues that education professionals play a major role in formulating the expectations that are placed on parents. She stresses that these expectations

form a *dominant set of cultural repertoires* about how children should be raised. This widespread agreement among professionals about the broad principles for child rearing permeates our society. A small number of experts thus potentially shape the behavior of a large number of parents (Lareau 2011: 4, emphasis in original).

In line with this interpretation, Schaub (2010) underlines that these ‘legitimate’ expectations are embedded in the education system, which not only impacts children but also their parents. Following this argument, maternal educational level can be understood not only as a resource in itself but also as a measure of exposure to ‘legitimate’ expectations about how to raise a child. I therefore assume that parents with a higher level of education are likely to be more engaged in the cognitive development of their child through organised activities than parents with a lower level of education are (**H2.1**). Furthermore, I apply a measure of cultural capital to shed light on intra-class heterogeneity. Following Jæger and Breen (2016), parents with more cultural capital must transmit their cultural resources to their offspring in order to reproduce it. Thus, I hypothesise that parents with more cultural capital¹⁹ will enrol their children in more organised activities than parents with less cultural capital (**H2.2**).

Besides these broader debates, scholars have criticised the fact that the term ‘social class’ often boils down to an ‘*umbrella concept* that aims to capture all the various aspects of social inequality that we know exist in contemporary societies’ (oral conference contribution by Goldthorpe cited in Lareau 2008: 11, emphasis in original). In the present study, I address this issue by examining the effect of different occupational conditions on participation in organised activities as a core variable. In addition to the indirect effect of social class through culture and resources, I assume that an occupational effect of social class persists. Accordingly, I

¹⁹ Cultural capital is understood as affinity to highbrow culture. For a critical assessment of this interpretation, see Lareau and Weininger (2003).

hypothesise that parents in professional jobs will enrol their children in more organised activities than parents in intermediate and manual jobs (**H3**).

4. DATA AND MEASUREMENT

4.1. Data and Estimation Strategy

My study uses the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS), which applies a multicohort sequence design in order to shed light on educational processes throughout a person's life (Blossfeld, von Maurice et al. 2011).²⁰ The NEPS provides high-quality data that complies with the comprehensive German legislation on data protection (Meixner, Schiller et al. 2011). In particular, Starting Cohort Kindergarten (SC2) provides information on parental activities for preschool children. So far, data on six waves are available. The second wave includes information on organised activity participation among preschool children, and is thus the focus of this study.

As no direct sampling frame exists for kindergartens in Germany, the NEPS applies an indirect sampling approach that uses a link between elementary schools and kindergartens in order to create a sample of kindergarten children (Steinhauer, Aßmann et al. 2015). In more detail, this approach involves the following steps (Steinhauer, Aßmann et al. 2015: 133). Firstly, an existing sampling frame provided by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany was used to draw a nationwide sample of schools that enrol first-grade students. These schools were then asked to specify which kindergarten institutions their pupils attended previously to enrolment at school. Finally, this information rendered it possible to select a sample of German kindergartens.

²⁰ This paper uses data from the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS): Starting Cohort Kindergarten, doi:10.5157/NEPS:SC2:4.0.0. From 2008 to 2013, NEPS data was collected as part of the Framework Program for the Promotion of Empirical Educational Research funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). As of 2014, NEPS is carried out by the Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories (LifBi) at the University of Bamberg in cooperation with a nationwide network.

As a result, the sample is a multilevel structure, with preschool children being nested in kindergartens. The independence assumption of linear regression is thus violated, and the data structure requires multilevel modelling or standard error correction for clustered data. I will use the latter approach for my analysis, as I have no hypothesis for the impact of the higher level.

I imputed missing values using a multiple imputation approach. The algorithm is described in King, Honaker et al. (2001). Even though the number of missing values is quite low (listwise deletion would remove 284 of the 1771 cases), this approach retains a full set of observations and avoids the bias that has been shown to arise with more traditional methods, such as casewise deletion (Johnson and Young 2011). Following results from a simulation study, I calculated 25 multiply imputed datasets using all variables of the analysis model (Johnson and Young 2011). I then ran all multivariate analyses on each of the imputed datasets. Finally, I combined the point estimates and standard errors according to Rubin's rules (1987).

In terms of the analytical strategy, I took a two-part approach. Firstly, I applied logistic regression with cluster-corrected standard errors in order to retain a full model with the effects of social class, culture and material resources while considering control variables. I give the coefficients as average marginal effects (AME) because their interpretation comes closest to standard OLS interpretation. In addition, the substantive interpretation of logits, odds ratios (OR) and even relative risks (RR) is not straightforward (Best and Wolf 2012).

Another pitfall that has hindered scholars in their attempts to break down the social class effect into its material and cultural dimensions is the problem of rescaling in non-linear models (Karlson, Holm et al. 2012). Accordingly, coefficients of nested models are not comparable as they are in the case of OLS regression. However, the Karlson-Holm-Breen method (KHB) (Karlson, Holm et al. 2012), which Kohler, Karlson et al. (2011) implemented in the statistical software package Stata, separates the total effect of an independent variable into its direct and indirect effects on an outcome variable. The method thus makes it possible to report the

magnitude of the effect that social class has on organised activity participation broken down according to culture and monetary constraints. This approach is summarised in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Direct and indirect effects of social class on organised activity participation

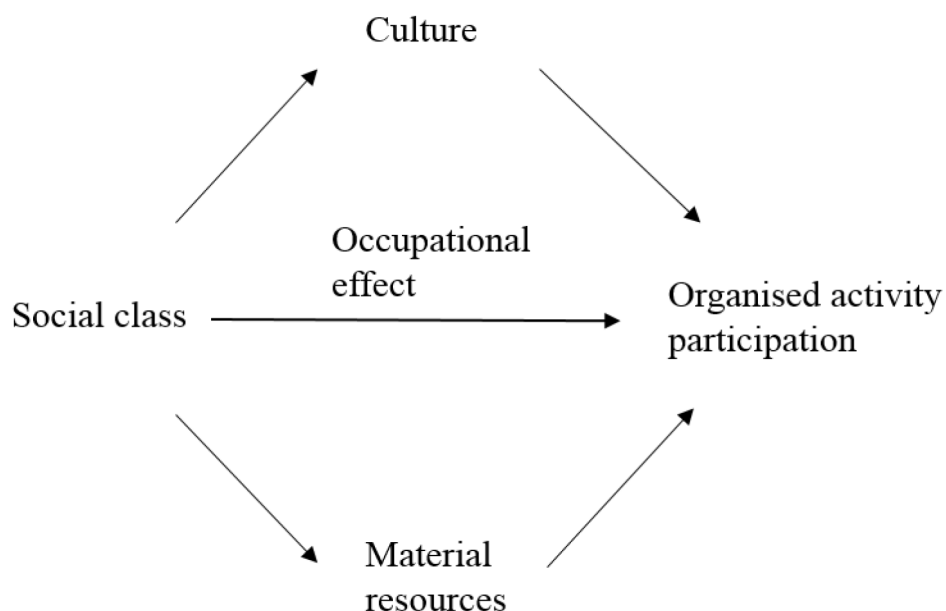
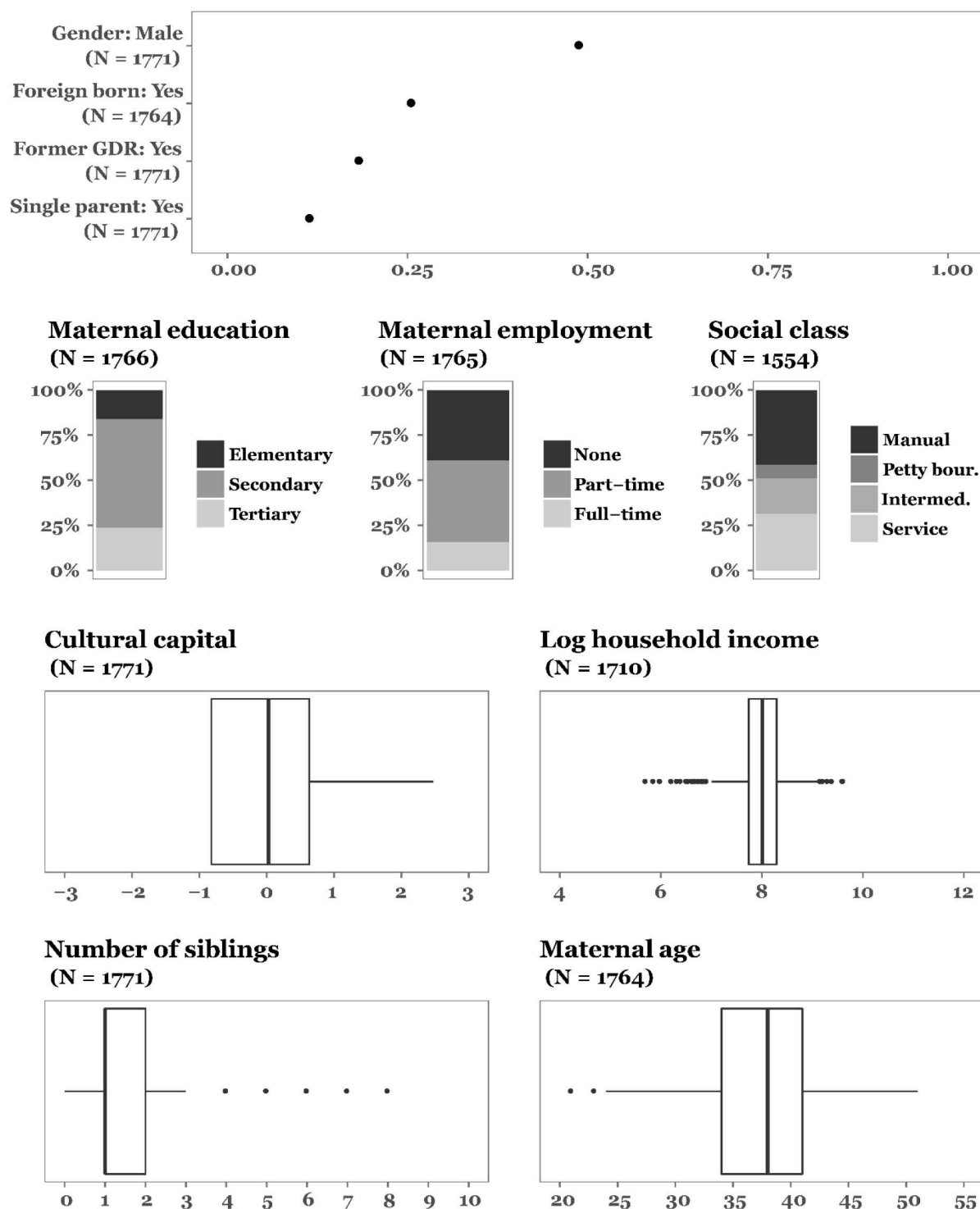


Figure 1 shows that the total effect of social class on organised activity participation consists of a direct effect (interpreted as occupational effect) and two indirect effects that run through culture and material resources. Hence, the direct and indirect effects sum up to the total effect of social class.

4.2. Independent Variables

As shown in the literature review, some scholars see parenting as investments of material resources (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013). To identify the effects of constraints on these resources, I have included the net household income in euros – log-transformed to normalise its distribution. I did not apply any adjustment for household size because household composition is incorporated into the model as a control variable.

Figure 2. Distribution of independent variables, weighted



Other scholars emphasise the effect of culture, so I included a measure of maternal educational level according to the CASMIN classification. Specifically, I distinguished between three groups: (1) a group with only elementary education, (2) a group with secondary

education and (3) a group with at least one tertiary qualification. Figure 2 provides information on the distribution of all independent variables using appropriate sampling weights.

In addition, I constructed a latent variable in order to measure familiarity with highbrow culture. It is based on three manifest variables which measure participation in cultural events such as visiting (1) museums, (2) operas or classical concerts and (3) theatre performances on an ordinal scale ranging from never to more than five times in the last year. In order to derive a single latent variable, I inspected the three indicators using a Kernel smoothing approach (Mazza, Punzo et al. 2014). This showed that a better fit is achieved when aggregating the item responses into three categories that indicate whether the above activities never happened (=1), happened between one and three times (=2), or happened more than five times (=3) in the last twelve months.

Finally, I applied a generalised partial credit model (GPCM) for polytomous data (De Ayala 2009). A parametric bootstrap goodness-of-fit test indicated a good fit for each dataset. This produced a single latent score which measures affinity to highbrow culture. Unfortunately, this information was only available for the main respondent of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the information stems from wave 1, as participation in highbrow activities is not included as a panel question. Nonetheless, a comparison of wave 1 with wave 3, when the question was asked again, indicates that the responses are quite stable.

As a measure of social class, I applied the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) class scheme in an aggregated four-class format. The EGP scheme has the advantage of closely resembling Kohn's understanding of occupational conditions, which include 'the substantive complexity of work typically performed, the closeness of supervision that the individual experiences, and the degree of routinization (...) of his or her job activities' (Weininger and Lareau 2009: 681). The EGP is based on the difficulty of monitoring and the specificity of

assets of job tasks as its defining features (Goldthorpe 2007[2000]), and hence constitutes a good proxy for Kohn's thesis. It distinguishes between a service class (EGP I/II), an intermediate class (IIIa/V), a petty bourgeoisie (IV) and a manual class (IIIb/VI/VII) (Breen 2005). Class is assigned on the basis of the person with the highest social class in the household.

4.3. Control Variables

In addition to these core variables of interest, my analysis also controlled for the place of residence (the former East Germany (GDR, coded as 1) or West Germany), the child's gender and the mother's age. As there is considerable debate on the role of immigration status, I constructed a dichotomous variable that differentiates between families where at least one person was born outside Germany (coded as 1) and families where all members are autochthonous. The model also includes the number of siblings in order to identify potential resource dilution between siblings (Strohschein, Gauthier et al. 2008).

4.4. Dependent Variables

The dependent variables are four items that indicate whether children regularly attend certain organised activities outside kindergarten.

Figure 3. Participation rates in organised activities, weighted

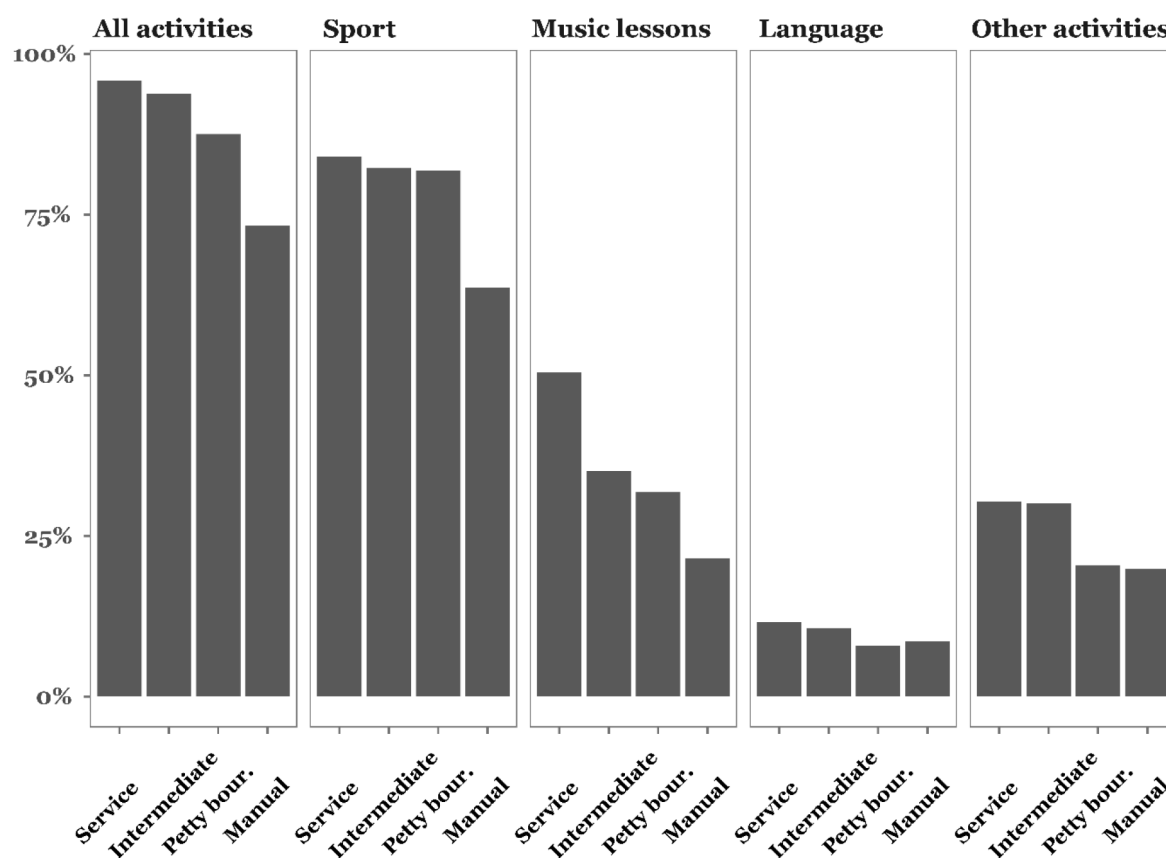


Figure 3 shows that organised activities are quite common during kindergarten. Taking all activities into account, participation ranges from 73% (manual class) to 96% (service class). However, there is considerable variation between activities. The high participation rates are mainly for sporting activities, while activities such as music lessons differ heavily according to social class. In the following analysis, I will begin by focusing on the general probability of attending at least one of the activities. I will then analyse the other activities in more detail.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1. General Participation in Organised Activities

I will assess the probability of participating in organised activities outside kindergarten by applying a logistic regression with cluster-corrected standard error. I will begin by discussing the full model, which includes all independent variables and controls (see Figure 4). The results

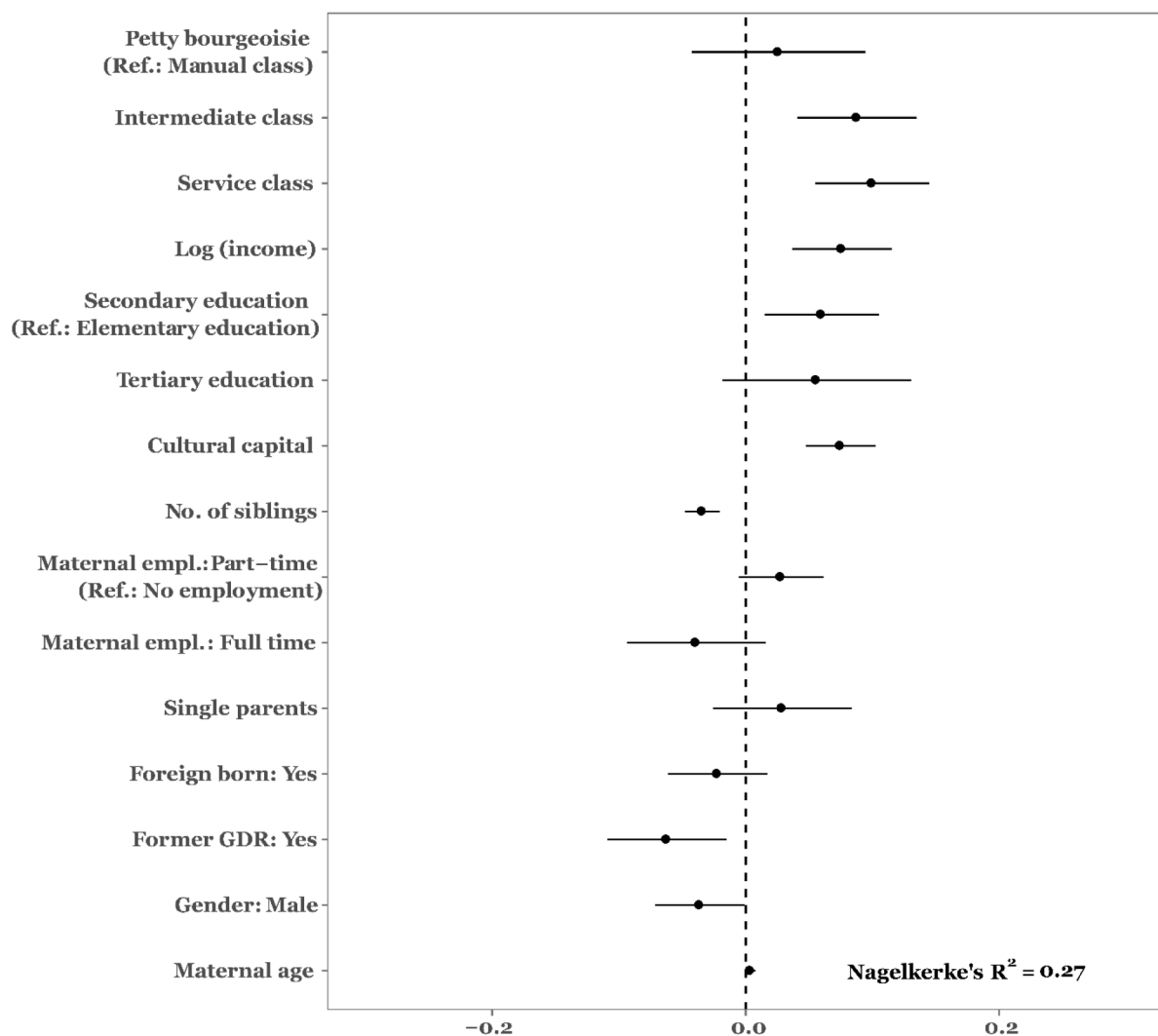
are reported as AME. All analyses were estimated using 25 imputed datasets. I present the full model as a dot plot which visualises the point estimates and 95%-confidence intervals. Coefficients that do not overlap with the vertical line have significant effects on the probability of organised activity participation. In addition, the more detailed regression tables (Table 3) are provided in the Appendix.

Regarding the results provided in Figure 4, my analysis confirms that both monetary resources and culture are statistically significant in determining children's organised activity participation. However, a more substantial interpretation shows that, on average, a 10% increase in income results in a minor increase (0.76 percentage points) in the probability of participating in organised activities (H1). Regarding the impact of maternal educational level (H2.1), mothers with secondary education are, on average, 6% more likely to enrol their children in informal education than mothers with elementary education are. However, the difference between mothers with elementary education and mothers with tertiary education is not statistically significant. In contrast, cultural capital has a significant and substantial effect (H2.2). Holding other variables constant, an increase in cultural capital from one standard deviation below its mean value (-0.69) to one standard deviation above (0.79) results, on average, in an 11 percentage points increase in the probability of organised activity participation.

Looking at the occupational effects proposed in H3, differences between the service class and the manual class persist even after taking structural and cultural constraints into account. More precisely, children of parents from the service class are, on average, 10 percentage points more likely to participate in organised activities than children of parents from the manual class. The same holds for children of parents from the intermediate class, who are still 9 percentage points more likely to participate in organised activities than children from the manual class. Thus, H3 finds support even after monetary resources and culture have been included.

Regarding the control variables, there is evidence to support the resource-dilution hypothesis, i.e. that having siblings decreases the probability of participating in organised activities.

Figure 4. Dot plot of the AME with 95%-confidence bands, organised activity participation (all activities, 25 imputed datasets)



In order to trace the confounding of the social class effect by culture and material resources, I used the KHB method. Table 1 provides information on the total effect (reduced model) and direct effect (full model) of social class on organised activity participation. The difference between these two coefficients indicates the strength of the indirect effect that runs through either culture or material constraints. In addition, column four shows the degree of confounding expressed as a percentage.

Table 1. Confounding of the social class effect on organised activity participation (all activities)

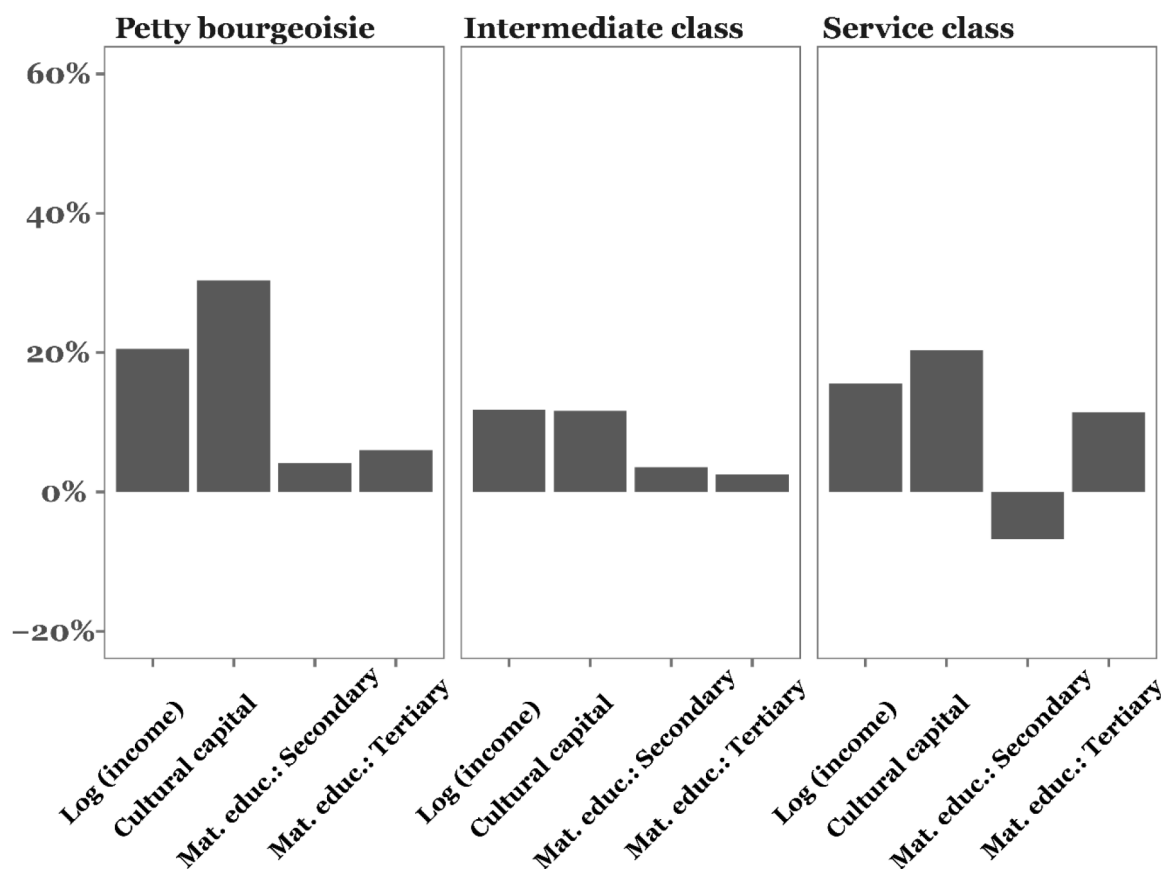
		Organized activity participation		
	Model	Coefficients (AME)	SE	Confounding percentage (%) ^a
Petty bourgeoisie (Ref.: Manual)	Reduced	0.071*	0.035	60.97
	Full	0.026	0.036	
Intermediate	Reduced	0.133**	0.025	29.45
	Full	0.087**	0.025	
Service	Reduced	0.164**	0.019	40.57
	Full	0.099**	0.023	

Regression using 25 imputed datasets; ** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$, + = $p < 0.10$

^aConfounding percentage was computed using logit coefficients.

The differences between the manual class reference category and the petty bourgeoisie, the intermediate class and the service class decline considerably once the measures for constraints on resources and culture are added. With the petty bourgeoisie, the difference ceases to be statistically significant. As for the intermediate class and the service class, 29.45% and 40.57% of the net social class gap is attributable to differences in resources and culture. However, a social class gap persists even after adding those variables. The KHB method also makes it possible to separate the confounding of social class into its individual components. The individual confounding percentages are provided in Figure 5 and show, again, that material resources and culture do matter, with cultural capital being a particularly strong mediating effect. In contrast, maternal educational level is of minor importance compared to cultural capital and material resources.

Figure 5. Individual components mediating the social class effect (all activities, 25 imputed datasets)



Overall, the analysis tells us that children born into families with a service class background, higher cultural capital and education, and greater monetary resources are more likely to participate in organised activities. In this case, we can rightfully speak of unequal opportunities from the start. Nonetheless, it has also been emphasised that “[w]e still do not know much about (...) which groups of parents enrol their children in what kinds of activities” (Vincent and Maxwell 2016: 277). I will address these questions in the following section.

5.2. Specific Activities

Having provided an overview of the probability of participating in at least one organised activity of any kind, I will now analyse the particular activities set out in Figure 3. Again, the results are presented in a dot plot with point estimates and 95%-confidence bands (see Figure 6). Instead of describing all results, I will focus on the most striking results and the differences between the different types of organised activities.

Figure 6. Dot plot of the AME with 95%-confidence bands for specific activities (25 imputed datasets)

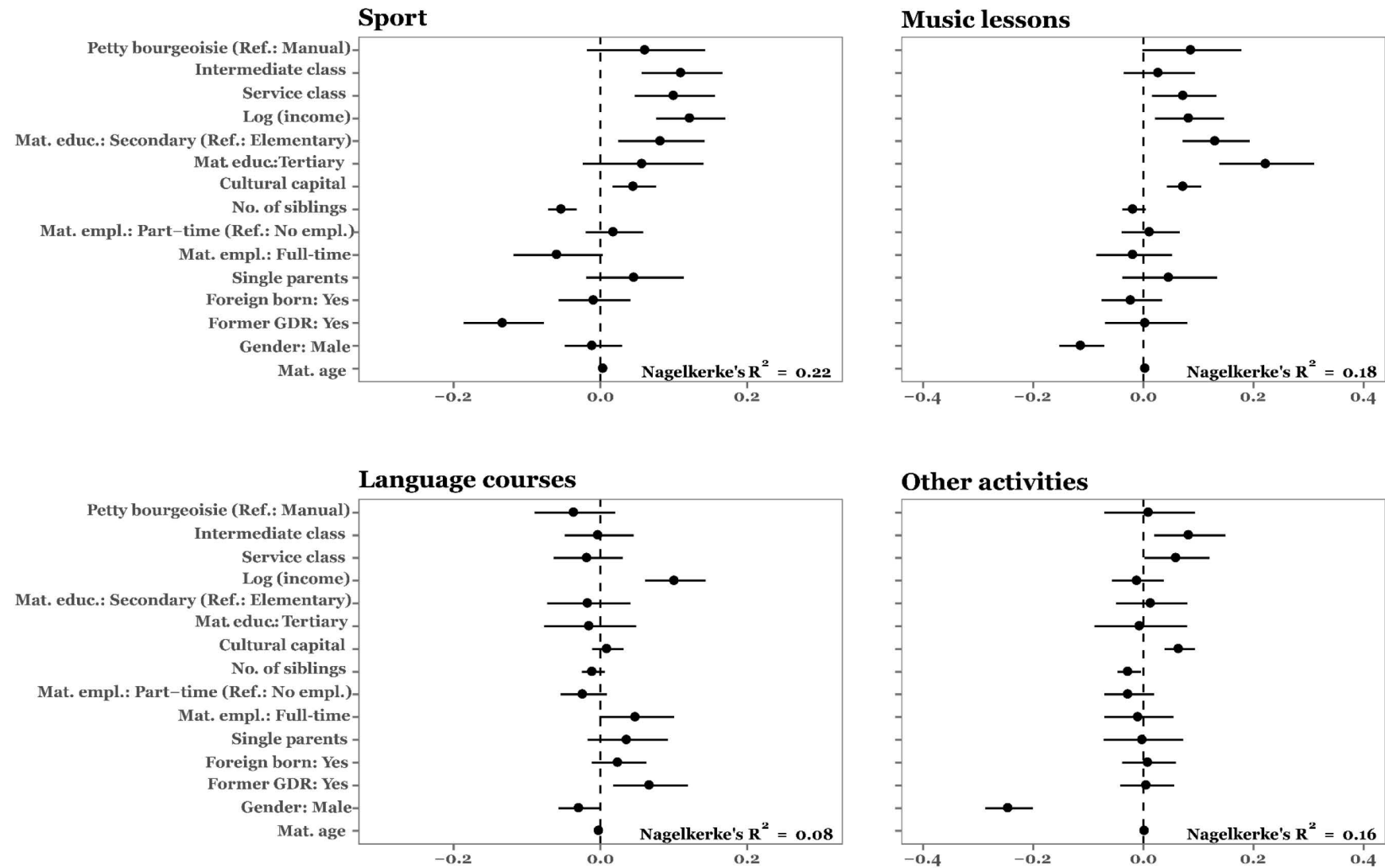


Table 2 thus provides an overview of the hypothesis and the results of the analysis. A plus sign indicates that the variable has a significant effect in the proposed direction (at least $p < .05$).

Table 2. Summary of the main effects on the different activities

Hypothesis		Sport	Music lessons	Language courses	Other activities
Material resources		+	+	+	
	(1) Maternal education		+		
Culture	(2) Cultural capital	+	+		+
Occupational effects		+	+		+

Overall, my hypotheses are supported. Again, it is clear that culture and material resources do matter. In addition, an occupational effect is apparent for three out of four activities – with the only exception being language courses. However, there are also differences between the activities. The decision to choose language courses in particular seems to follow a different pattern than expected. Although monetary resources emerge as a decisive predictor, neither culture nor occupation plays a role. In contrast, material resources do not seem to be an obstacle for participation in other activities such as handicrafts and dance lessons.²¹ Surprisingly, maternal education only has a sizeable effect on the probability of attending music lessons. In this case, however, the variable has a remarkable effect: mothers who hold a tertiary degree are 22.4% more likely to enrol their children in music lessons than mothers with elementary education are. Still, the strong effect of maternal education observed in comparable studies might partly be caused by their use of a catch-all indicator for organised activities (see Mühler and Spieß 2008, Schober and Spiess 2013).

²¹ The question includes handicrafts, dancing and ballet as examples of other activities in which a child might take part. This wording might partly explain why the participation rate among girls is 25% higher.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With this paper, I set out to analyse preschool children's organised activity participation through 'a social class lens' (Hartas 2015: 33). I have shown that the dividing line between scholars who align themselves with either a structural or cultural approach to social class and parenting is an artificial one. Both paths function mutually rather than exclusively. Accordingly, further theoretical work is needed to integrate both perspectives into the research on social class and parenting, and to avoid falling back into a simplified narrative of socio-economic status. More importantly, a social class gap in organised activity participation persists even after taking both approaches into account. I interpret this finding as a call to continue research in the vein of Melvin Kohn, who was interested in the role of occupational conditions beyond the workplace (Kohn 1963, Kohn and Slomeczynski 1993). I have applied this perspective in this paper.

The empirical foundation of social class differences in organised activity participation is still insufficient. Notwithstanding this fact, governments across Europe have identified informal education as a potential vehicle to mitigate social inequalities. For instance, the German government supports less affluent children's leisure activities with monetary subsidies (Affairs 2015). While these children can potentially benefit from this programme, its design neglects the roots that lead to an unequal uptake of organised activities. This paper proposed to take a step back in order to analyse in how far material constraints, culture, and occupational conditions contribute to the social class gap in organised activity participation. My analysis indicates that families' social position matters most for attending music lessons. Playing a musical instrument has been shown to exert strong effects on school grades and cognitive development (Hille and Schupp 2015). Accordingly, future research should take into account not only material constraints but also cultural understandings in order to inform policymakers.

A final problem with the current state of the field is that wider societal changes are not incorporated into empirical analyses. As Faircloth (2014) noted, we are currently witnessing the emergence of ‘a particular parenting style (...) in Euro-American contexts that is widely considered “ideal”’ (48). Two issues could be raised here. On the one hand, this transformation can be interpreted as a struggle for the power to impose the ‘right’ or ‘legitimate’ way of raising children. In this sense, the inherent danger of scapegoating parents in less favourable positions is ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu 1985) which yields ‘high benefit-cost ratios and rates of return’ (Heckman 2008: 290) for those who can conform to the ‘legitimate’ expectations embedded in institutions such as the education system. On the other hand, the discussions on ‘legitimate’ parenting which have been characterised as ‘parenting out of control’ (Nelson 2010) have also alienated middle-class parents (Perrier 2013). This development could easily be aggravated by a ‘rug rat race’ (Ramey and Ramey 2010) in which parents have to invest more and more into the cognitive development of their children without improving their family’s social class position. In each case, greater consideration of the macro-level context is advisable in order to formulate appropriate hypotheses at the individual level.

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Appendix

Table 3. Logistic regression on organised activity participation using AME and cluster-corrected SE, N = 1771

Covariates	All activities		Sport		Music lessons		Language courses		Other activities	
	AME	SE	AME	SE	AME	SE	AME	SE	AME	SE
Social class:										
Petty bourgeoisie (Ref.: Manual class)	0.026	0.035	0.062	0.041	0.088+	0.046	-0.035	0.028	0.011	0.042
Intermediate class	0.088**	0.024	0.111**	0.028	0.029	0.033	-0.002	0.024	0.084*	0.033
Service class	0.1**	0.023	0.101**	0.028	0.074*	0.03	-0.017	0.024	0.061*	0.03
Material constraints:										
Log (income)	0.076**	0.02	0.123**	0.024	0.084**	0.032	0.102**	0.021	-0.01	0.024
Culture:										
Mat. educ.: Secondary (Ref.: Elementary)	0.06**	0.023	0.083**	0.03	0.132**	0.031	-0.016	0.029	0.015	0.033
Mat. educ.: Tertiary	0.056	0.038	0.058	0.042	0.224**	0.044	-0.014	0.032	-0.005	0.043
Cultural capital	0.075**	0.014	0.046**	0.015	0.074**	0.016	0.01	0.011	0.066**	0.014
Control:										
No. of siblings	-0.034**	0.007	-0.052**	0.01	-0.017	0.011	-0.01	0.008	-0.026*	0.011
Mat. empl.: Part-time (Ref.: Not employed)	0.028+	0.017	0.019	0.02	0.013	0.027	-0.023	0.016	-0.026	0.023
Mat. empl.: Full-time	-0.039	0.028	-0.058+	0.031	-0.017	0.035	0.049+	0.026	-0.008	0.032
Single parent	0.029	0.028	0.047	0.034	0.048	0.044	0.037	0.028	0	0.037
Foreign-born: Yes	-0.022	0.02	-0.008	0.025	-0.021	0.028	0.025	0.019	0.01	0.025
Former GDR: Yes	-0.062*	0.024	-0.132**	0.028	0.005	0.038	0.068*	0.026	0.007	0.025
Child's gender: Male	-0.036*	0.018	-0.01	0.02	-0.112**	0.021	-0.028+	0.015	-0.244**	0.022
Mat. age	0.004*	0.002	0.005*	0.002	0.005*	0.002	-0.001	0.002	0.004+	0.002
Model fit:										
Nagelkerke's R ²	0.27		0.22		0.18		0.08		0.16	

Regression using 25 imputed datasets; ** = p < 0.01, * = p < 0.05, + = p < 0.10

APPENDIX

SUMMARY

The thesis at hand investigates conceptions and practices of parenthood in Germany. How families approach their childrearing has attracted growing interest in politics, science, and by (education) professionals. Today, parents are encouraged to seek expert advice to inform their childrearing. Such advice often involves the expenditure of considerable amounts of time and money. At the same time, the state has become increasingly active in the intimate life of families and, in particular, their parenting practices. As a result, the cultural models of parenthood in Germany have been changed.

At the background of these changes, I designed three papers that analyze (1) the conditions of family policy change, (2) the way parents adopt changing expectations and demands, and (3) the relationship between parenting practices and social class. In order to address these questions, the respective articles use survey and digital data as well as methods from the computational social sciences (CSS).

The first paper “A Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy: Applying a Topic Model to Map Reform and Public Discourse, 1990-2016” shows how public discourse and critical events such as the ‘PISA shock’ helped to open a window of opportunity for policy reform. The article also investigates how policymakers draw on discursive strategies in order to push for their reform initiatives.

The second article “Playground Chatter on the Internet? Models of ‘Good Parenting’ in a Parent Online Forum” uses data from a large parent online forum to explore whether the aforementioned changes are discussed by users and how they negotiate them. The paper finds that several topics such as expert advice have become relevant cornerstones of the online discussion. What is more, users relate to expert advice predominantly in a positive manner. As a result, the article indicates that the political and discursive changes have important repercussions for parents.

The third article “(Un)equal from the Start? An Analysis of Preschool Children’s Organised Activity Participation in Germany” analyzes the extent to which parents social class, material resources, and culture contribute to unequal organized activity participation by their offspring. The paper shows that strong disparities still exist between children of more affluent and educated parents in the service class and those of working-class parents, who lack the resources to provide their children with several organized activities.

In sum, the dissertation expands our knowledge on the current recalibration of parenthood in Germany. It also introduces innovative methods from CSS to family sociology. Finally, cultural models of parenthood are proposed as a way to organize the research on changing standards and norms of parenthood.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht kulturelle Vorstellungen und Praktiken von Elternschaft in Deutschland. Wie Familien ihre Kinder erziehen ruft ein steigendes Interesse von Seiten der Politik, Wissenschaft und weiterer (Bildungs-)Professionen hervor. Gegenwärtig wird von Eltern erwartet, dass sie sich mit Expertenwissen auseinandersetzen, welches oftmals kostspielige und zeitaufwändige Praktiken nahelegt. Zur gleichen Zeit nehmen staatliche Akteure verstärkt Einfluss auf das familiäre Leben und insbesondere die Kindererziehung. Als Folge dieser Entwicklung haben sich die kulturellen Vorstellungen von Elternschaft in Deutschland gewandelt.

Mit diesen Entwicklungen beschäftigt sich die vorliegende Arbeit innerhalb dreier Artikel. Im Einzelnen betrachten die Artikel: (1) die Bedingungen von familienpolitischen Reformen, (2) die elterlichen Diskussionen um sich wandelnde Erwartungen sowie (3) die Auswirkung der elterlichen Klassenposition auf deren Erziehungspraktiken. Um diese Fragen zu beantworten greifen die Artikel sowohl auf Umfragedaten als auch digitale Daten zurück. Zudem werden neuere Methoden der computergestützten Sozialforschung angewandt.

Der erste Artikel „A Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy: Applying a Topic Model to Map Reform and Public Discourse, 1990-2016“ zeigt wie das Zusammenspiel aus öffentlichem Diskurs und kritischen Ereignissen („PISA-Schock“) dazu beigetragen hat, dass Politiker ihre Reformideen umsetzen konnten. Des Weiteren untersucht der Artikel welche diskursiven Strategien politische Akteure verwenden, um für ihre Reforminitiativen zu werben.

Der zweite Artikel „Sandkastengespräche im Netz? Leitbilder ‚guter Erziehung‘ in einem digitalen Elternforum“ nutzt Daten einer digitalen Diskussionsplattform, um zu untersuchen, ob die Nutzer sich mit den erwähnten Veränderungen beschäftigen und wie sie sich zu diesen verhalten. Der Artikel zeigt, dass viele Veränderungen von den Nutzern aufgegriffen werden. Insbesondere Expertenwissen spielt eine bedeutende Rolle, wobei dieses von den Nutzern zumeist positiv bewertet wird. Dementsprechend zeigt die Untersuchung, dass der politische und diskursive Wandel bedeutende Auswirkungen auf Eltern hat.

Der dritte Artikel „(Un)equal from the Start? An Analysis of Preschool Children’s Organised Activity Participation in Germany“ untersucht inwieweit die elterliche Klassenposition, deren Einkommen sowie Bildung zur ungleichen Nutzung von organisierten Aktivitäten ihrer Kinder beiträgt. Insbesondere zeigt der Beitrag, dass weiterhin starke Disparitäten zwischen Kindern von wohlhabenden sowie gebildeten Eltern der Dienstleistungsklassen und denjenigen Eltern der Arbeiterklassen bestehen, die weniger Ressourcen zur Verfügung haben, um ihren Kindern vielfältige organisierte Aktivitäten zu ermöglichen.

Insgesamt erweitert die vorliegende Dissertation unser Wissen um den aktuellen Wandel von Elternschaft in Deutschland. Zudem werden innovative Methoden der computergestützten Sozialforschung in die Familiensoziologie eingeführt. Zuletzt wurde mit kulturellen Leitbildern von Elternschaft ein Zugang vorgeschlagen, der es erlaubt den gegenwärtigen Wandel von Elternschaft zu untersuchen.